

# BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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Canada in Motion

# From the Writings

**O** SON OF MAN! Ponder and reflect. Is it thy wish to die upon thy bed, or to shed thy life-blood on the dust, a martyr in My path, and so become the manifestation of My command and the revealer of My light in the highest paradise? Judge thou aright, O servant!

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, From the Arabic #46.

**W**e cherish the hope that through the loving-kindness of the All-Wise, the All-Knowing, obscuring dust may be dispelled and the power of perception enhanced, that the people may discover the purpose for which they have been called into being. In this Day whatsoever serveth to reduce blindness and to increase vision is worthy of consideration. This vision acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p.35.

**I** render Thee thanks, O Thou Who hast lighted Thy fire within my soul, and cast the beams of Thy light into my heart, that Thou hast taught Thy servants how to make mention of Thee, and revealed unto them the ways whereby they can supplicate Thee, through Thy most holy and exalted tongue, and Thy most august and precious speech. But for Thy leave, who is there that could venture to express Thy might and Thy grandeur; and were it not for Thine instruction, who is the man that could discover the ways of Thy pleasure in the kingdom of Thy creation?

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXXVI.

**I**t is better to guide one soul than to possess all that is on earth, for as long as that guided soul is under the shadow of the Tree of Divine Unity, he and the one who hath guided him will both be recipients of God's tender mercy, whereas possession of earthly things will cease at the time of death. The path to guidance is one of love and compassion, not of force and coercion. This hath been God's method in the past, and shall continue to be in the future! He causeth him whom He pleaseth to enter the shadow of His Mercy. Verily, He is the Supreme Protector, the All-Generous.

There is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God's Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, to sail upon the sea of the heavenly kingdom of His good-pleasure, and to partake of the choice fruits of the paradise of His divine Oneness.

– The Báb, *Excerpts from the Persian Bayan*, II, 16.

**N**ow is the time, O ye beloved of the Lord, for ardent endeavour. Struggle ye, and strive. And since the Ancient Beauty was exposed by day and night on the field of martyrdom, let us in our turn labour hard, and hear and ponder the counsels of God; let us fling away our lives, and renounce our brief and numbered days. Let us turn our eyes away from empty fantasies of this world's divergent forms, and serve instead this pre-eminent purpose, this grand design. Let us not, because of our own imaginings, cut down this tree that the hand of heavenly grace hath planted; let us not, with the dark clouds of our illusions, our selfish interests, blot out the glory that streameth from the Abhá Realm. Let us not be as barriers that wall out the rolling ocean of Almighty God. Let us not prevent the pure, sweet scents from the garden of the All-Glorious Beauty from blowing far and wide. Let us not, on this day of reunion, shut out the vernal downpour of blessings from on high. Let us not consent that the splendours of the Sun of Truth should ever fade and disappear. These are the admonitions of God, as set forth in His Holy Books, His Scriptures, His Tablets that tell out His counsellings to the sincere.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 264-5.

**O** Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 63.

**O** servant of Bahá! Be self-sacrificing in the path of God, and wing thy flight unto the heavens of the love of the Abhá Beauty, for any movement animated by love moveth from the periphery to the centre, from space to the Day-Star of the universe. Perchance thou deemest this to be difficult, but I tell thee that such cannot be the case, for when the motivating and guiding power is the divine force of magnetism it is possible, by its aid, to traverse time and space easily and swiftly. Glory be upon the people of Bahá.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 197-8.

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## ON THE COVER

A painting by Donald Rogers entitled  
*The Creative Word – An Ocean of Movement*.  
Acrylic on Paper, 2006.

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# Ridván 2019 Message

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

Dearly loved Friends,

**A**s the Most Great Festival has drawn closer, we have been transported by feelings of gratitude and anticipation—gratitude for the wonders that Bahá'u'lláh has enabled His followers to accomplish, anticipation of what the immediate future holds.

The momentum generated by the worldwide celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh has only grown since. The accelerated development of the Bahá'í community, its rising capacity, and its ability to draw on the energies of more of its members emerge vividly from a summary of its recent global attainments. Of these, an increase in community-building activities stands out in particular. The current Five Year Plan follows twenty years of effort by the Bahá'í world to systematically refine and multiply these activities—but remarkably, in the Plan's first two and a half years, the number of core activities alone rose by more than half. The worldwide community has shown the capacity to engage, at any given time, over a million people in such activities, helping them to explore and respond to spiritual realities. In the same short period, the number of gatherings for prayer nearly doubled—a much-needed response to humanity's growing estrangement from the Source of hope and bounty. This development holds special promise, for devotional meetings infuse a new spirit into the life of a community. Interwoven with educational efforts for all ages, they reinforce the lofty purpose of those efforts: to foster communities distinguished by their worship of God and their service to humankind. Nowhere is this more evident than in those clusters where the participation of large numbers in Bahá'í activities is being sustained and the friends have passed the third milestone in their community's development. We are delighted to see that the number of clusters where the process of growth has advanced this far has already more than doubled since the beginning of the Plan and now stands at around five hundred.

This brief survey cannot do justice to the scale of the transformation that is under way. The outlook for the remaining two years of the Plan is bright. Much has been achieved this last year by widely disseminating lessons learned from the stronger programmes of growth in clusters that, as we hoped, have become reservoirs of knowledge and resources. The International Teaching Centre, the Counsellors, and their tireless auxiliaries

have stopped at nothing to ensure that friends in all parts of the world can benefit from this acceleration in learning and apply the insights being gained to their own realities. We rejoice to see that in a growing number of clusters, and in neighbourhoods and villages within them, a nucleus of friends has emerged who through action and reflection are discovering what is required, at a particular point, for the process of growth to advance in their surroundings. They are drawing on the potent instrument of the institute, through which capacity to contribute to the spiritual and material prosperity of the community is enhanced, and as they act, the number of those joining them is increasing. Naturally, conditions vary greatly from place to place, as do the characteristics of growth. But through systematic striving, everyone can make a more and more effective contribution to the work at hand. In every setting, there is pure joy in engaging other souls in meaningful and uplifting conversations that lead, whether quickly or gradually, to the stirring of spiritual susceptibilities. The brighter the flame kindled within the heart of the believer, the greater will be the force of attraction felt by those exposed to its warmth. And to a heart consumed with love for Bahá'u'lláh, what more fitting occupation can be imagined than to seek out kindred spirits, to encourage them as they enter the path of service, to accompany them as they gain experience and—perhaps the greatest joy of all—to see souls become confirmed in their faith, arise independently, and assist others on the same journey. These are among the most cherished of all the moments that this transitory life affords.

The prospects for advancing this spiritual enterprise are made the more thrilling by the approach of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Like the bicentenary that preceded it, this anniversary is a moment incalculably precious. It provides all Bahá'ís with marvellous opportunities for awakening those around them to the great Day of God, to the extraordinary effusion of heavenly grace signalled by the appearance of two Manifestations of the Divine Being, successive Luminaries Who brightened the horizon of the world. The measure of what might be possible in the coming two cycles is known to all from the experience of the bicentenary two years ago, and all that was learned on that occasion must be channelled into the plans for the Twin Holy Birthdays this year. As the two-hundred-year anniversary draws near, we will offer frequent supplications on your behalf in the Sacred Shrines, praying that your efforts to befittingly honour the Báb will succeed in advancing the Cause He foretold.

The close of the first century of the Formative Age is but two and a half years away. It will seal one hundred years of consecrated effort to consolidate and expand the foundation so sacrificially laid during the Faith's Heroic

Age. At that time the Bahá'í community will also mark the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that moment when the beloved Master was released from the confines of this world to rejoin His Father in the retreats of celestial glory. His funeral, which occurred the following day, was an event "the like of which Palestine had never seen". At its conclusion, His mortal remains were laid to rest within a vault of the Mausoleum of the Báb. However, it was envisaged by Shoghi Effendi that this would be a temporary arrangement. A Shrine was to be erected, of a character befitting the unique station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at the appropriate time.

That time has come. The Bahá'í world is being summoned to build the edifice which will forever embosom those

sacred remains. It is to be constructed in the vicinity of the Rídván Garden, on land consecrated by the footsteps of the Blessed Beauty; the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will thus lie on the crescent traced between the Holy Shrines in 'Akká and Haifa. Work on the architectural plans is advancing, and more information will be shared in the coming months.

Feelings of surpassing joy now surge within us, as we contemplate the year ahead and all that it promises. We look to every one of you—those who are occupied with rendering service to Bahá'u'lláh, labouring in every nation for the cause of peace—to fulfil your high calling.

– The Universal House of Justice

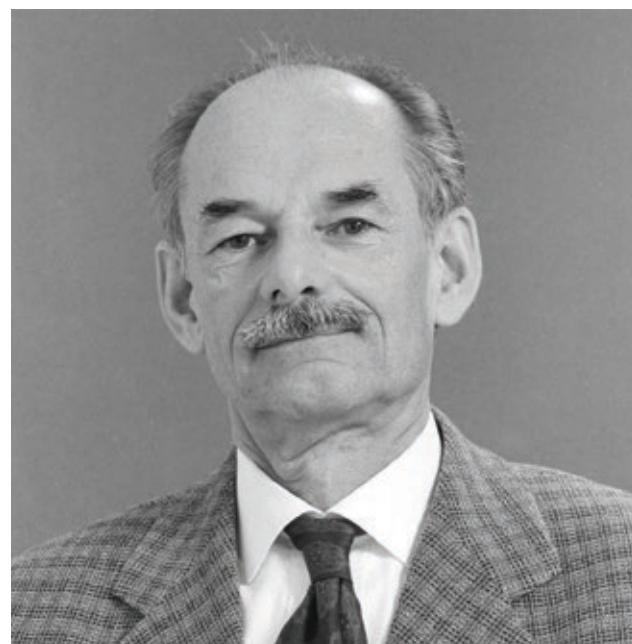
## The passing of Mr. Donald Rogers

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 28 April 2019.

Dearly loved Friends,

With deep sadness we mourn the passing of Donald Rogers, ardent teacher of the Faith whose attraction to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh as a young man shaped several decades lived in devoted service. He was a highly accomplished artist of international standing, and his work demonstrated a profound relationship to the sacred; his prodigious talents were often the means through which other souls became acquainted with the dawning of the new Day of God. The years he served as an Auxiliary Board member and then as a Continental Counsellor were followed by the decade he spent as a member of the International Teaching Centre. In his later years he continued his consecrated endeavours, including on the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada. Unstinting in his efforts to serve the Faith and with great accomplishments to his name, he remained a man of humility and selflessness, gracious and gentle.

We offer our heartfelt condolences to his dear wife, Barbara, and to his children Klee, Sasha, and Julie, and we assure them of our supplications in the Holy Shrines for the progress of his illumined soul throughout the eternal realms. All Bahá'í communities are asked to hold



Mr. Donald Rogers. Photo: Bahá'í World News Service

memorial gatherings in his honour, including in every House of Worship.

– The Universal House of Justice

## Regarding the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 7 May 2019.

Dearly loved Friends,

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Mr. Hossein Amanat of Canada as architect for the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

We are also pleased to announce the inauguration of a Fund dedicated to the construction of the Shrine. It is

our heartfelt desire that this sacred edifice will be raised up through the universal participation of the friends.

– The Universal House of Justice

# Response to the National Convention

From the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada,  
14 May 2019.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We were greatly heartened by the sense of eagerness and strong resolve communicated in the message sent to us by the delegates to your National Convention, and were pleased to read of the delegates' focused attention on the rich experience your community has accumulated and the path that lies immediately ahead. We look to the dear friends in Canada, particularly in this special period leading up to the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, to make a spirited and courageous

effort to respond to the burgeoning receptivity amongst their compatriots through sustained and dynamic participation in the process of community building. In the prayers we offer in the Holy Shrines, we will be sure to entreat the Blessed Beauty for divine assistance to surround them as they arise to offer their share to the global spiritual enterprise now under way.

— The Universal House of Justice

# Membership of the Board of Trustees

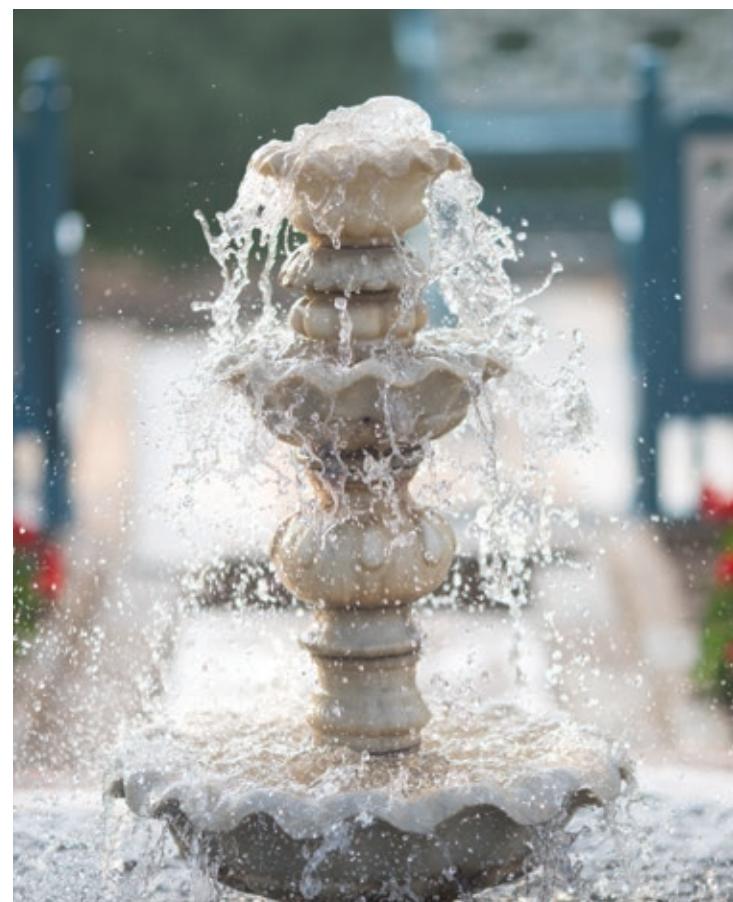
From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 19 May 2019.

We are delighted to announce the appointment of the members of the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for a five-year term commencing on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, 24 May 2019: Ho Yuet Mee, Enos Makhele, Manijeh Reyhani, Adam Robarts, and William Wietes. We are profoundly grateful to Marzia Rowhani Dalal for the exemplary service she has rendered to this institution.

— The Universal House of Justice

The institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh will, during the course of this Dispensation, contribute to the spiritualization of humanity through the promotion of a new attitude to the acquisition and use of material resources.

— The Universal House of Justice to the Deputies and Representatives of the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, 12 January 2003.



Fountain at the Riqván Garden. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

# Website for The Bahá'í World

From the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 23 May 2019.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to write to you concerning the publication *The Bahá'í World*. Established in 1926 during the time of Shoghi Effendi's ministry, the volumes were published until 2006, after which certain functions, such as conveying news and developments of the Bahá'í community and thoughtfully presenting to the world at large what Bahá'ís believe and do, started to be fulfilled by official national websites and the family of sites associated with Bahai.org, including the Bahá'í World News Service, and also by publications such as *The Five Year Plan, 2011–2016: Summary of Achievements and Learning and For the Betterment of the World*. The House of Justice feels, however, that there is value in collecting in one location a selection of thoughtful essays, as well as substantial articles and features on a range of subjects that would be of interest to the wider public. It has therefore decided that it is timely to establish *The Bahá'í World* as a website and envisions that the site, which is located at bahaiworld.bahai.org, will gradually be augmented with content that conveys advances at the levels of thought and action and reflects the Faith's purpose and mission in the world. In due course, consideration will also be given to the release of volumes of *The Bahá'í World* in book form.

Given these developments, the House of Justice hopes that National Assemblies will, as they deem appropriate, inform their communities about this promising resource.

– Department of the Secretariat



A new official Bahá'í website makes available thoughtful essays and articles on contemporary issues and developments. Photo: Bahá'í World News Service

# News of Community Properties

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, 8 March 2019.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

**F**urther to our earlier communications about the Community Properties Fund (previously named the Community Endowment Fund), the National Spiritual Assembly wished to share with you some exciting developments in this increasingly important area of the work of the Faith in Canada. Several Assemblies have asked questions about the administration of this Fund and the implications for their budgeting process, which we also wish to address.

As we shared with you in our letter dated 16 April 2018, decades-long efforts to learn about growth have underlined the importance of the strategic and timely purchase and rental of property, whether at the national, regional, cluster, or neighbourhood level. Indeed, since the National Assembly embarked on a process of learning about the acquisition, maintenance and use of property in the context of the needs of the Five Year Plan, great strides have already been made. In Ontario and British Columbia, the two regions whose work serves dozens of clusters each, the acquisition of suitable regional administrative space allowed them to establish a regional office, described in the 28 December 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice, removing obstacles to their ability to pursue the work of the Plan. Neighbourhood properties have been acquired to serve the growing need for space for meetings and core activities in four neighbourhoods across the country, and a search is in process in three others. In several clusters, pioneer homes have been rented to support the neighbourhood service of homefront pioneers.

An example of the limitations imposed by a lack of space and the possibilities that emerge when those restrictions are lifted has been described by the friends in one of these neighbourhoods. With the formation of five junior youth groups in a two-week period and in conversation with the parents, they realized that the stability of the junior youth programme required a public space for their activities. In consultation with their Local Spiritual Assembly and Auxiliary Board member, who then consulted with the National Assembly, priority was given in the context of a

national plan to renting a neighbourhood space, funded by the Local Assembly. This rental of property is seen as a natural first step in building capacity and learning about the management and programming of such a building.

Where the Community Properties Fund comes into this picture is that it is intended to generate income that will ensure that the need for properties at every level is met according to a strategic national plan. It may be that a Local Assembly will see a need for a neighbourhood property, or perhaps a Local Bahá'í Centre. In the 1 April 2016 letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, a principle is clarified that even the acquisition of a Local Bahá'í Centre is subject to priorities determined nationally. Thus, when opportunities for growth emerge in a particular area of the country, they will be met, regardless of the size or relative wealth of the Bahá'í community. This allows the entire country to participate in supporting growth wherever it occurs. The Community Properties Fund is the mechanism through which funds will flow.

A question has arisen as to whether a Local Spiritual Assembly which has received earmarked contributions for a Local Haziratu'l-Quds over the years may contribute the funds to the Community Properties Fund to hold and generate income until it is judged that a Local Bahá'í Centre in its community is a priority. The answer is that a Local Assembly is indeed encouraged to do so, confident that the earmarking is recorded and will be respected, and that when, in consultation with the National Assembly it is judged timely, the necessary funds will be released. It is precisely to allow for this return of funds that the nature of the Fund and its name have been changed from "Community Endowment Fund", which would have certain restrictions placed on it, to the more general "Community Properties Fund".

Between now and the end of the Plan, new life will be given to neighbourhoods, clusters and regions that are experiencing growth, through the removal of obstacles of space. With this simple step, an array of complex capacities begin to develop — to assess the need for property by reading reality, to determine the nature of the space needed and undertake a search, to tend to the need to beautify the space and keep it clean, and not least, to manage programming of shared spaces.

The National Assembly has contributed an initial sum of \$2.5 million to the Community Properties Fund and lovingly invited the community to match that sum by the end of the Plan, so that the community enters the next Plan with confidence that the funds for an ever-expanding community's needs are being generated. It is with joy that we share with you that almost \$2 million

has been added to that initial infusion, representing generosity and sacrifice by individuals and institutions alike.

We ask that you share this news with your communities, with the assurance of the National Assembly's prayers

that their support of this newly-emerging, important area will attract mighty confirmations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

# Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils, and Registered Groups, 1 May 2019.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are happy to share with you the results of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly on Sunday, 28 April 2019. 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: Deloria Bighorn, Karen McKye, Mehran Anvari, Hoda Farahmandpour, Ciprian Jauca, Élizabeth Wright, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Gerald Filson, and Judy Filson.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada



The members elected to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly (clockwise): Karen McKye, Dr. Mehran Anvari, Deloria Bighorn, Ciprian Jauca, Judy Filson, Zelalem B. Kasse, Élizabeth Wright, Hoda Farahmandpour, Dr. Gerald Filson. Photo: Liam Moore

# Message to the Feast of Grandeur

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá'ís of Canada, 16 May 2019.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Two years ago, stirred by the momentum building towards the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and conscious of its transformative potential, the National Spiritual Assembly began a series of letters to the community that spurred a more intimate conversation between us. In turn, you shared news of a tremendous flourishing of activities, of victories and wonderful challenges as you sought to more deeply

understand and convey to others a sense of "what it means for humanity that these two Luminaries rose successively above the horizon of the world." As the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb approaches, we are entering a similar period, another moment "incalculably precious". Urged and inspired by the friends present at the National Convention, and with great joy, we return to this conversation.

Though preparations for the festivities marking the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb have a special context, they are also an extension of the first bicentenary. At that time, the Universal House of Justice lifted our vision of what was possible as we sought to engage the “widest possible cross-section of society” in remembrance of God and service to humanity in the period leading up to the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh. Over 100,000 souls, an unprecedented number, were introduced to Him in some way, and many of them became involved in community activity through your efforts. These are seeds that you have been patiently nurturing towards fruition, and new growth has emerged through this labour of love. This is the work of the hour. As you have tended this garden, you have experienced the truth of what the House of Justice said in the Ridván message this year: “In every setting, there is pure joy in engaging other souls in meaningful and uplifting conversations that lead, whether quickly or gradually, to the stirring of spiritual susceptibilities. The brighter the flame kindled within the heart of the believer, the greater will be the force of attraction felt by those exposed to its warmth. And to a heart consumed with love for Bahá’u’lláh, what more fitting occupation can be imagined than to seek out kindred spirits, to encourage them as they enter the path of service, to accompany them as they gain experience and—perhaps the greatest joy of all—to see souls become confirmed in their faith, arise independently, and assist others on the same journey. These are among the most cherished of all the moments that this transitory life affords.”

In a letter dated 1 June 2018 addressed to all National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice commented on the special nature of this bicentenary, and that some features of the first would not apply. For example, this is not a time to seek public tributes from

dignitaries and prominent members of society, though efforts to nurture such relationships in a natural manner would of course continue. In addition, we may have been tempted to think of the community’s attention “turning” to the Báb, as it was focused on the Person of Bahá’u’lláh in 2017. Yet, in its references to this occasion, the House of Justice underlines the relationship between the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, whose Cause the Báb foretold and to which He was the promised Gate. Even in recalling the stories of the heroic acts of the dawn-breakers — those youthful lionhearts — we look beyond an exploration of history. These narratives “enable the friends, who are occupied with responding to the needs of the Cause in this day, to draw inspiration and courage... They assist the company of believers to realize that, by consecrating themselves to the acts of service required in this age, they are emulating the noble qualities of their spiritual forebears.”

Powerful examples of these noble qualities were seen in the intensity, discipline and concentrated, creative effort of the friends during the period surrounding the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, and in your continued response to the National Assembly’s two calls to action in April 2018. All that was learned at that time is now ready to be channeled into your efforts to nurture every seed you have planted and plant new ones, as the community advances towards the celebrations for the Twin Holy Birthdays this year. We pray that your conversations as friends, families, fellow-gardeners, at this Feast and beyond, will draw out this experience and reinforce your efforts. To this end, we hope that the friends consulting at this Feast might think about how they can carry its spirit and widen its embrace to those who have not been able to participate.

Our love and our ardent prayers are with you.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

# Message to the Feast of Mercy

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá’ís of Canada, 24 June 2019.

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

In its Ridván message this year, the Universal House of Justice commented that the International Teaching Centre, the Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members “have stopped at nothing” to ensure that lessons learned in one part of the world are quickly disseminated, allowing the friends in other countries to apply the insights to their own realities. In April this year, a priceless gift was given to the Canadian Bahá’í community to directly learn from the Sydney, Australia

cluster, through a 10-day visit by a team of friends from the Vancouver and Toronto clusters.

The vision of growth they brought back galvanized the friends present at the National Convention and those watching the Convention via livestreaming and since then, participants in post-Convention gatherings. As the delegates learned how a strong institute process and working with larger numbers has created a vibrant, purposeful, welcoming community life in the Sydney

cluster, they began to think about how the lessons learned could apply to our own reality in Canada.

The prospect of working with larger numbers, far from being a mere numerical exercise of multiplying core activities, drew inspiration from the statement in the 26 March 2016 message to the Bahá'ís of the United States and of Canada: “The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society”. This truth brought the friends from every part of the country — from Nunavut to British Columbia to Newfoundland — together in a spirited, united commitment to support two of Canada’s clusters, Vancouver and Toronto, in their aim of achieving 500 core activities by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb and 1000 core activities by the end of the Plan. A third cluster, Ottawa, has now joined these two with a goal of over 800 core activities by the end of the Plan.

These numbers take on new meaning as we ponder the daily news, a parade of evidence that the destructive processes are gaining strength in a world crying out for meaning, for hope, for unity and peace. Every devotional gathering established is a “much-needed response to humanity’s growing estrangement from the Source of hope and bounty” that kindles the flame of love in the heart. Every junior youth group is a step in establishing patterns of a coherent life that channels belief into action. Every study circle is a path to penetrating the meaning of His Revelation and bringing it into the visible world through service. Every children’s class mines the potential of these gems of inestimable value. Every meaningful conversation, whether in a home visit or a fireside, is an antidote to despair, leading quickly or gradually to the stirring of spiritual susceptibilities. Rising up out of these processes is a new people with new patterns of individual and collective life. You are bringing this reality into being, through your every prayer, act of service, your every sacrifice.

Around you who are present at this Feast or are reading this message in your homes are tens of thousands who

have already responded to the conversations you have initiated in relationships you have nurtured. Between now and the end of the Plan in April 2021, the widening embrace of the community- building work will extend to hundreds of thousands. How can we not recall those passages from the Guardian that speak of a thousandfold increase in the fortunes of the Faith? And are we not then drawn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s summons: “Thus far ye have been untiring in your labors. Let your exertions henceforth increase a thousandfold. Summon the people in these countries, capitals, islands, assemblies and churches to enter the Abha Kingdom. The scope of your exertions must needs be extended. The wider its range, the more striking will be the evidence of divine assistance.”

*This truth brought the friends  
from every part of the country  
— from Nunavut to British  
Columbia to Newfoundland —  
together in a spirited,  
united commitment to support  
two of Canada’s clusters,  
Vancouver and Toronto,  
in their aim of achieving 500  
core activities by the bicentenary  
of the Birth of the Báb and  
1000 core activities  
by the end of the Plan.*

reflection and consultation. They need rhythm and consistency and above all, a careful consideration by individuals, communities and institutions of how to spend precious time and resources.

For this day is unlike other days. Nineteen weeks remain until the bicentenary anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, during which your efforts will focus on advancing the Cause He foretold. Eighteen months later, this Plan — the final one in this series of Plans — will conclude, and shortly thereafter the Bahá’í world will commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the inauguration of His Covenant. A unique period in human history will draw to a close, and new horizons will appear. That the flame of love for the Twin Manifestations will have grown to a blaze in each of your hearts, and that the diverse peoples of Canada will have been warmed by its intensity, is our ardent prayer.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

# From the Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh

To those gathered at the 71st National Convention  
of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 26 April 2019.

Dear Friends,

**W**ith gratitude to the National Spiritual Assembly, the Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh in Canada wishes to share with you a few words about the Right of God – that “mighty act”<sup>1</sup> the liberating influence of which we have, so far, only dimly experienced.<sup>2</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh has “blotted out from the pages of God’s holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief amongst the children of men.”<sup>3</sup> Desiring “to manifest grace and beneficence … and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws”.<sup>4</sup> Among all these laws and principles, Huqúqu'lláh (the Right of God) stands out prominently.<sup>5</sup>

As lovers of the Blessed Beauty we are asked to broaden our knowledge on matters related to this “highly significant”<sup>6</sup> ordinance in such a way that it, and its application, are integrated into our daily life.<sup>7</sup> What it might mean to so consciously obey this “profoundly private act of conscience”<sup>8</sup> to the degree that it becomes a daily observance, rather than an annual or monthly consideration of one’s financial affairs with the view to determining if payment is due, is -- and will be for many years to come -- among the many frontiers of learning in the Bahá’í world. Equally unknown is the impact such consciousness on the part of one protagonist of the Plan would have on the other two.

Applying the law in one’s life is not a linear process. It is a cyclic and reflective one that develops many virtues. As

awareness and understanding of the law increases, one begins – and then refines – its implementation. And, as a result, Bahá'u'lláh’s exhortation to: “Strive ye with all your might, O people, that ye may bring forth that which will truly profit you in the worlds of your Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Praised.”<sup>9</sup> is fulfilled and its promise of “divine increase, prosperity, dignity and honour”<sup>10</sup> realized.

“Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality – that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the present “state of the world reflects a distortion of the human spirit, not its essential nature.”<sup>12</sup> “The destructive forces of materialism dominate both the East and the West”<sup>13</sup> and “consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul”.<sup>14</sup>

We exist “in the midst of a society acutely disordered in its material affairs.”<sup>15</sup> Given this milieu, “Bahá'u'lláh is asking of us nothing less than a complete reversal of habitual human behaviour.”<sup>16</sup> If, however, “a new model of community life, patterned on the teachings, is to emerge, must not the company of the faithful demonstrate in their own lives the rectitude of conduct that is one of its most distinguishing features? Every choice a Bahá’í makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and 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.”<sup>17</sup> It is, “in the final analysis, through the spiritual decisions and actions of the individual believers that the Faith moves forward on its course to ultimate victory.”<sup>18</sup>

Although an obligation, Huqúq is a purely voluntary act, never to be solicited. “It would be impossible to conceive any act more contemptible than soliciting, in the name of the one true God, the riches which men possess.”<sup>19</sup>

9 *Huqúqu'lláh – The Right of God*, April 2007, amended August 2009.

10 *The Right of God – Huqúqu'lláh*, Revised edition 1999, #45.

11 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Compilation of Compilations*, Volume I, page 254.

12 Universal House of Justice, Ridván, 2012.

13 Universal House of Justice, 24 October 2018 to the Bahá'ís of Iran.

14 Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013 letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran.

15 Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015 letter to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

16 Banani, Dr. Amin, *The Institution of Huqúqu'lláh: The Concept of Law*, talk given at the Arabic Session of Landegg Academy, August 1991.

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

18 Universal House of Justice, 25 February 1986 letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

19 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, XLIII & C respectively.

1 *Huqúqu'lláh – The Right of God*, April 2007, amended August 2009.

2 Banani, Dr. Amin, *The Institution of Huqúqu'lláh: The Concept of Law*, talk given at the Arabic Session of Landegg Academy, August 1991.

3 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, XLIII & C respectively.

4 Bahá'u'lláh, *General Prayers: Marriage*.

5 Varga, Dr. Ali Muhammad, talk given during the Huqúqu'lláh Conferences in Barcelona, Spain and Hofheim, Germany, October 1999.

6 *The Right of God – Huqúqu'lláh*, Revised edition 1999, #45.

7 Varqa, Dr. Ali Muhammad, 29 September 2006 letter to the Institutional Conference, held at the Toronto Bahá’í Centre.

8 *Huqúqu'lláh – The Right of God*, April 2007, amended August 2009.



Colonnade of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

*“Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society.”<sup>20</sup> Besides being a necessary element in “managing one’s financial affairs in accordance with spiritual principles”,<sup>21</sup> “an indispensable dimension of a life lived coherently”,<sup>22</sup> and “a matter of conscience”<sup>23</sup> for the individual, obedience to the law of the Right of God is also “a way in which commitment to the betterment of the world is translated into practice.”<sup>24</sup>*

Discharging with joy one’s obligation ensures “that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good.”<sup>25</sup> It brings “into the realm of existence civilization-building powers which can only be released through conformity with His decree.”<sup>26</sup> It is “a joyful way of building the strong fabric of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”<sup>27</sup> and for establishing “a necessary framework to ensure equity and justice in the distribution of wealth”.<sup>28</sup>

What other personal ordinance addresses so directly our twofold moral purpose – “to develop ... inherent potentialities and to contribute to the transformation of society”?<sup>29</sup>

Obedience to the Right of God has already had a “profound impact ... on the worldwide activities of the Bahá’í community, an impact that portends far-reaching implications for the transformation of society.”<sup>30</sup>

20 Universal House of Justice, Ridván, 2010.

21 Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015 letter to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

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

26 Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010 letter to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

27 Banani, Dr. Amin, The Institution of Ḥuqúqu’lláh: The Concept of Law, talk given at the Arabic Session of Landegg Academy, August 1991.

28 Universal House of Justice, 24 October 2018 to the Bahá’ís of Iran.

29 Universal House of Justice, 12 December 2011 letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

30 Universal House of Justice, 21 June 2016 letter to the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

The “followers of Bahá’u’lláh have successfully laid the foundations of a worldwide community transcending all differences that divide the human race, and have brought into existence the principal institutions of a unique and unassailable Administrative Order that shapes this community’s life.”<sup>31</sup> With increased visibility and engagement with society, however, comes the need for more concentrated attention to the economic dimension of social existence.<sup>32</sup>

We in Canada are fortunate. Our country’s future, “whether from a material or a spiritual standpoint, is very great.”<sup>33</sup> Let us then rise to the responsibility implied by that promise, attach not ourselves “to the luxuries of this ephemeral world,”<sup>34</sup> free ourselves “from every attachment, and strive with heart and soul to become fully established in the Kingdom of God.”<sup>35</sup>

With a mandate to assist in promoting understanding of the spiritual significance of this “supremely important link between the spiritual and material aspects of Bahá’í life”,<sup>36</sup> Representatives and Deputy Trustees stand ready to accompany and assist anyone interested in exploring and learning more. Please call upon us.

With heartfelt love for each and every one of you,  
The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada

31 Universal House of Justice, 24 May 2001 letter to the Believers Gathered for the Events Marking the Completion of the Projects on Mount Carmel.

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

33 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, #13 Tablet to the Bahá’ís of Canada and Greenland.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Varqa, Dr. Ali Muhammad, 30 September 1993 letter to all the Deputies and Representatives of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

# From the delegates to the Universal House of Justice

To our most beloved Universal House of Justice,

Joy has filled our hearts at this 71st National Convention, overwhelmed and inspired as we are by the bounties of this Ridván. “Lowly and tearful, we raise our suppliant hands” in thanks for the gifts unceasingly being showered upon us.

We received with heart-stopping awe the thrilling news contained in the Ridván message that we have now arrived at the historic moment for the erection of a befitting Shrine for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Holy Land, bringing “His boundless love and tender solicitude” close. The reflections and stories shared by delegates of the relationship that young people of all backgrounds in Canada are developing with the beloved Master, through the influence of the institute and through visits to the Shrine in Montreal, demonstrated their deep and personal connection with Him. Together with accounts of the spiritual character, the attitudes, skills and qualities they are developing as they take charge of their own progress and that of their communities - these give us confidence that there are hundreds of thousands more of such souls to be found in Canada. Delegates were pleased with the augmentation of the budget by the National Spiritual Assembly of \$500,000 for the new Shrine in the Holy Land and encouraged further commitment.

Our gratitude to the International Teaching Centre is deep, for bestowing on two of our clusters the bounty of participating in the pilot learning project with clusters that have passed the third milestone. The conceptions of teaching and the marvellous opportunities associated with the approaching bicentenary, as described in the Ridván message, were enhanced by the stories and learning from Sydney, which friends from Toronto and Vancouver shared. We hunger to learn how to apply these insights and to explore their manifold implications in the company of our Counsellors Shabnam Tashakour and Borna Noureddin and their Auxiliary Board Members. We are deeply grateful to have them by our sides and beg your prayers that our labours will be confirmed.

The news, on the morning of the election, that the soul of our most cherished brother, Otto Donald Rogers, had pierced that delicate membrane between earth and heaven, was deeply moving. Having prayed for him only two days

before, we found ourselves in a kind of conversation with souls. We recalled the passing of Shapoor Monadjem together with a number of distinguished and fondly-remembered servants of the Canadian community during the past year. Following a spiritual period of voting, we were astonished at the head teller’s announcement that not only had the Convention again achieved 100% participation in the election, but that we had done so with a stunning achievement of excellence never before seen, with zero spoiled ballots or votes. We joyfully welcomed the new membership of our National Spiritual Assembly. We soared even higher on the news that over the lunch break our national body, in the company of the Counsellors, and having heard the delegates’ eagerness to respond to the precious opportunity of this day, their readiness to move ahead, and seeing the Convention being of one mind, was raising the call for a heroic response to the material needs of the coming year. The National Assembly anticipates needs of at least two million dollars beyond the budget. With this news, the Convention consultation responded with unflinching confidence in the capacity of the friends to arise and reorient their lives in whatever way necessary to respond to the ongoing material needs that will arise, with the view that an open and relevant flow of communication between the three protagonists in more and more spaces will attract the community to the sacrificial standard modelled by the Dawn-Breakers.

*“How can we further describe the atmosphere, character and content of such a dynamic Convention?”*

How can we further describe the atmosphere, character and content of such a dynamic Convention? The humble service of many radiant and happy volunteers and the lovingly-selected and potent devotions, including the voices of children, lent a sanctified quality to the sessions. The consultation--at once serious and focused, unified and joyful--was guided by the National Spiritual Assembly’s skillfully prepared materials. The discipline of the delegates in addressing the pertinent questions posed by the National Assembly, their unity of thought, their expressions of hopefulness, the clarity around the essential contributions needed from all ages, gave evidence that our diverse community is decidedly in one conversation, born of firsthand experience with the framework and instruments of the Plan. We saw glimpses of a “more worthy etiquette of expression”, one that is devoid of criticism, that “refocuses endeavour” and “contributes to happiness and well-being”.

Other distinctive elements included the message of the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh which raised our consciousness to the level of how daily reflection on this holy act might shape our choices and habits, to attune to the spiritual reality at work in the world and not the “acutely disordered” worldly environment that surrounds us. The Convention was graced by the visits of an honoured guest, Mr. Douglas Martin, who was so happy to be present, and we were deeply touched by his gift to each one present of a memoir of his helpmate and beloved handmaid of Bahá, Mrs. Elizabeth Martin. The calibre of the annual reports of the National Spiritual Assembly, its agencies at the national and regional levels, and the insights shared in the report from the Learning Desk were illustrative for us of thought processes characteristic of an attitude of learning. The Convention noted that these reports, as well as the comments of the delegates, highlighted the progress of the teaching work with Indigenous populations in every region of the country. The Counsellors emphasized the power of the institute

to remedy the suffering of society and their confidence in the capacity of the Indigenous and French-Canadian peoples, like all others in Canada, to wield this instrument for the advancement of their communities. Finally, we are grateful to the National Assembly’s commitment to the ongoing learning around the use of technology to expand the space of the Convention, through live-streaming to the Canadian Bahá’í community.

With our hearts consumed with love for Bahá'u'lláh, we pledge to take back to our communities the spirit that has galvanized this Convention and emboldened each of us to take advantage in the upcoming months of “this moment incalculably precious” to offer universal “efforts to befittingly honour the Báb” and “succeed in advancing the Cause He foretold”, ultimately “guiding the lovers to the seat of sanctity and to this resplendent Beauty”.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,  
The delegates of the 71st National Convention  
of Canada



Group photo including the delegates, Counsellors and newly elected members of the National Spiritual Assembly. Photo: Liam Moore.

# About this issue

**A**mong the friends to take flight to the “world of mysteries” this year was Mr. Donald Rogers. In 2017, Mr. Rogers wrote to Bahá’í Canada identifying four paintings that he felt best reflected his inspiration from the spirit of the Faith and offered them for publication. Our cover image, titled *The Creative Word – An Ocean of Movement*, is one of these. This issue of *Bahá’í Canada* takes inspiration from the concept of movement; both the literal movement of pioneers and pilgrims, and that of populations as they move towards Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for a new society.

Pioneers illuminate our history as a country. The story “Canada’s Knights of Bahá’u’lláh,” contributed by Anne Boyles, recalls the friends living in Canada who responded to the Guardian’s call during the Ten-Year Crusade to open new territories to the Faith. She connects their stories to our task today. Their sacrificial efforts and steadfastness in the face of hardship still shapes our identity as a community.

This identity was evident at this year’s National Convention. Galvanized by a presentation from friends who had recently visited Sydney, Australia, to learn about embracing large numbers, the delegates expressed confidence in our community’s ability to respond to the pressing needs of the current Plan. As we realized how rich the learning was from the group’s visit to Australia, this issue’s feature article, “Stories from Sydney,” emerged, which aims to amplify this stirring vision across Canada.

Much is being learned about the movement of youth through the sequence of Ruhi Institute courses, especially as they arise to serve, often as junior youth animators or children’s class teachers. In the article “Systematic

striving: raising up neighbourhood youth,” Melanie Vafaie shares the experience of friends in Brampton, Ont., who implemented a regular rhythm of institute campaigns, through which 139 young people have entered the study of Ruhi Institute Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* since 2012. Through this process, the nucleus of friends acting and reflecting in their neighbourhood has been expanding.

In recent years, the Universal House of Justice has deepened our understanding of the concept of an expanding nucleus of friends, “who are working and consulting together and arranging activities.”<sup>1</sup> For the article “The role of the nucleus in community development,” we interviewed friends from three clusters, of varying sizes and stages of development – Peterborough, Ont., Saanich, B.C and Montreal, Q.C. – about their experiences serving, shoulder to shoulder, as part of a nucleus of friends.

In its 24 June 2019 message, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote: “Between now and the Twin Holy Days on 29 and 30 October, we urge each of you to re-examine the calls in the National Assembly’s 6 April 2018 letter and think of how your own efforts to build the world anew can achieve new levels of focus and intensity, whatever your circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> We look forward to reporting on the efforts of the friends in Canada in our forthcoming issue, as the Bahá’í community seizes the “marvellous opportunities for awakening those around them to the great Day of God.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

<sup>2</sup> From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá’ís of Canada.

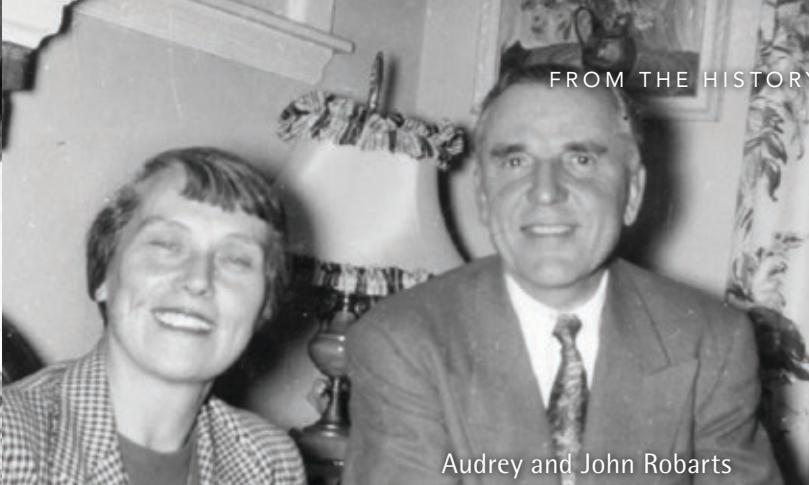
<sup>3</sup> The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, Ridván 2019.

## 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 [bcanada@bahai.ca](mailto:bcanada@bahai.ca).



Edythe MacArthur



Audrey and John Robarts



Kathie Weston



Ola Pawlowska



Irving and Grace Geary



Kay Zinky

Photos: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

## Canada's Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Writing to the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada, the Universal House of Justice stated: "The process of entry by troops that emerged so tenuously in the Ten Year Crusade, and was fostered in the decades that followed, is now being extended through a sound process of community building in center after center in all those countries and territories that 'Abdu'l-Bahá marked out so long ago."<sup>1</sup>

Central to the goals of the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963) were the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, consecrated souls who left their homes to open new territories to the Faith. Conscious of their legacy, stories of their trials and triumphs sustain us in our efforts to serve the same Divine Plan.

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the chosen recipients of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada, 26 March 2016.



Ted and Joan Anderson with their sons Mark (left) and Chris



Catherine and Cliff Huxtable



Gale and Jameson Bond



Bruce Matthew

Photos: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

**C**anada—a fledgling national community whose National Spiritual Assembly had been established only five years before—might have been excused for thinking itself to be too new to play a significant role in this global undertaking, but Shoghi Effendi's expectations were great. His message to the Canadian Convention on 19 April 1953 unfolded the nation's audacious mission. After congratulating Canada on the "triumphant conclusion" of its efforts during the Five Year Plan that was launched at the time of its emergence as an independent national Bahá'í community, the Guardian described it as the "prelude" to a "mightier undertaking." This undertaking would focus not only on consolidating the "magnificent victories" that had been won on Canadian soil but also on inaugurating the

"community's historic mission" far beyond.

To this end, he tasked the community with opening "virgin territories" in North America and the Pacific, with consolidating the Faith in Greenland, MacKenzie and Newfoundland, with purchasing land for Canada's first Bahá'í House of Worship and with doubling the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies. These were the "sacred strenuous tasks," that the Guardian called on the community to "discharge nobly," referring to the community as "worthy allies" and "chief executors" of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, from which the goals of the Crusade had been drawn.

Soon after that initial message, Shoghi Effendi emphasized that the settlement of pioneers in the virgin areas he had identified was of crucial importance and in this

regard, Canada should not only feel responsible for filling its own goals, but Canadians should also pioneer to other countries' goal territories if opportunities presented themselves. And this the members of the Canadian Bahá'í community—with support from their sister community south of the border—did with courage, persistence, and zeal. The names of the Knights who arose to fulfill the goals shine brightly in the annals of our history.

Many of the places where these modern-day heroes and heroines ventured have flourishing Bahá'í communities today. But back in 1953, the case was quite different. In fact, a letter written on the Guardian's behalf admitted that "a few of the islands and territories embodied in the Plan are extremely difficult 'nuts to crack.'" However, the community's attempts to fulfill

the goals before them continued unabated.

## To the East

This was especially true of Anticosti Island in Quebec. Because it was a privately-owned island, it was almost impossible to settle there. It took three years of attempts by the National Assembly before Mary Zabolotny McCulloch secured employment on the island and won the title of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Anticosti in 1956. Unfortunately, she was only able to stay several months before she was forced to leave. She went on to spend 20 years in Baker Lake, Nunavut, where she and her family established the Bahá'í House and promoted the translation of the Teachings into Inuktitut.

St. Pierre Island, near Newfoundland and Labrador, was another particularly difficult “nut.” Ola Pawlowska, the Knight who pioneered there in October 1953, wrote of her arrival: “How to describe the feeling I had, flying to this speck of rock on the grey Atlantic? In a way it was as if a mighty wind had broken my earthly moorings and was carrying me on the wings of ‘be dependent on God alone.... Here I was, an envoy from the Mighty King to this speck of land.’ Treated as an outcast for two years, she was accused of being a spy and was often the subject of gossip. The locals eventually warmed up to her when she befriended a young boy and his family—although they were still not receptive to the message she had brought. After four years, with Shoghi Effendi’s permission, she departed the island but pioneered again to Africa for more than three decades. The Knights for the close-by Magdalen Islands, Kathie Weston and Kay Zinky, also encountered difficulties of health, isolation and discouragement in their pioneering experience, surmounting them through intense prayers that were answered with the appearance of seeking souls.

Prayer was a regular source of relief from the tests and difficulties that come with pioneering to new, unopened areas. Cape Breton was opened by four Knights of Bahá'u'lláh—two couples: Irving and Grace Geary, who were, by that point, seasoned by pioneering stints in other Maritime provinces, and Fred and Jeanne Allen, from British Columbia. Grace spent part of the first winter in a drafty cabin designed for summer visitors while Irving’s work kept him elsewhere. Finally, Grace decided that she could take no more: “I said the Remover of Difficulties over and over again. Inside of 10 days, Irvin’s work had been transferred... and by the beginning of February we had found a warm, comfortable apartment.” They remained on Cape Breton until 1961, when they were asked to return to Charlottetown, P.E.I., to maintain the Assembly there. Fred and Jeanne, who settled in a community about 80 kilometers from the Geary’s, supported themselves by opening a small grocery store—which gave them the opportunity to meet and teach people who came in. They remained on the island until 1962.

The Knights for Labrador, Howard Gilliland and Bruce Matthew, arrived separately in 1954, Howard from the U.S. to serve as a captain at the air force base in Goose Bay for about a year. Bruce—who had embraced the Faith in late 1953—also found work on the base, as a civilian, and remained until 1956. Teaching the Faith proved challenging in that environment and Bruce is recorded as lamenting, “Perhaps the Guardian will some day tell us why it is that people always wait until they have one foot on a train, boat or plane before they casually turn and ask, ‘By the way, what is this Bahá'í Faith?’”

Doris Richardson, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Grand Manan in Atlantic Canada, pioneered there in answer to the Guardian’s call in September 1953. Life was not easy, and patience was key to her service. It was four years before the first

resident of the island embraced the Faith, which filled her with “supreme joy.” Doris lived to see the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly before her passing, still at her post, in 1976.

## To the West

Doris’ sister, Edythe MacArthur, pioneered to multiple places in Canada before also becoming a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. While Doris went east, Edythe pioneered to the Queen Charlotte Islands on the Pacific coast—and the opposite side of the country. As Hand of the Cause John Robarts put it, they had “covered the water fronts.”

The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh for the Gulf Islands, Cliff and Cathy Huxtable, arrived on Salt Spring Island in October 1959. To support the family, Cliff initially worked as a self-employed manual laborer but eventually became the vice-principal of a high school. He and Cathy, who suffered from muscular dystrophy, began hosting firesides in their home shortly after arriving at their post. Enrolments followed, and the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Gulf Islands was formed in 1964. However, difficulties led to the Huxtables’ departure in 1965, after which they pioneered again to St. Helena, a 16-kilometer-long island, 2,000 miles west of Africa in the Atlantic Ocean. Cathy died there in 1967.

## To the North

The day after they were married, Jamie and Gale Bond embarked on their epic pioneering journey to the District of Franklin in the Canadian Arctic in July 1953. The trip north on the icebreaker took two months, but they eventually arrived in Arctic Bay, where Jamie worked at the weather station and Gale served as the cook for the crew there. The bitter cold, the long hours of darkness and the close proximity of crew members with dissimilar personalities made service difficult, but the Bonds were undaunted. They remained in the District, living

in different communities, until the end of the Ten Year Crusade.

Another pair of newlyweds who embarked on their northern pioneering venture to win the title of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh were Ted and Joan Anderson, who arrived in Whitehorse, Yukon, in September 1953. When they got off the train, a fellow passenger advised them, “If I were you-all, I’d get right back on board this train and head south!” But they had a mission in mind and refused to be perturbed. Instead, they carried some of their suitcases a block down the dusty Main Street to a hotel. Ted wrote, “For \$7.50 a night we got a room without a bath—and, as Joanie noted in her diary, ‘PRAYED LIKE MAD!’” The Andersons survived the bitter winter and the following spring received a letter from the Guardian, with instructions: “He urges you to concentrate on the native population, as it is for that reason that we have opened new countries to the Faith. May you be confirmed in this teaching effort...” The community grew, the first Local Spiritual Assembly was elected in 1959, and teaching efforts among the Indigenous believers led to further growth, as new believers arose with enthusiasm, dedication and wisdom to teach their families and members of their communities. By the time Joan and Ted left the Yukon in 1972, after 19 years of service, there were some 400 Bahá’ís, many of them indigenous. Their efforts had, indeed, been confirmed.

In the District of Keewatin, Dick Stanton won the distinction of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh in the tiny settlement of Baker Lake, which had only about 100 residents at that time, remaining there for some five years. His initial work was later nurtured by Mary Zabolotny McCulloch and her family.

## To the South

In a much warmer clime, a pioneer from Canada, Gretta Jankko answered the Guardian’s call to become the Knight for the Marquesas

Islands in the Pacific, administered by France and the “least known virgin goal assigned to the Canadian Community.” While life was outwardly primitive, Gretta wrote, “All the time on those islands I was very happy. I loved the people and we were very close to each other; they asked me many times not to go away from the islands.” While she overcame difficulties with obtaining visas to remain at her post, she was forced to leave after an attempt on her life in 1955. The authorities told her they could not guarantee her safety and she left to continue her service in Finland.

Also distant, though in an entirely different direction, the South African homeland of Bechuanaland (now Botswana) was the pioneer post where John, Audrey and Patrick Robarts won the honour of being named Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. At one of the Intercontinental Teaching Conferences held to launch the Crusade, John and Audrey became excited about the idea of pioneering and wrote to Shoghi Effendi, suggesting that they would go to the Yukon, Labrador or Iceland. His response must have come as quite a shock to them: “Bechuanaland highly meritorious.” So rather than north, they headed south, arriving at their post 16 weeks later. By 1957, the same year that John was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God, the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Bechuanaland formed in Mafeking, and the family relocated to what is now Zimbabwe, where the first Local Assembly was established the following year. They remained in Africa until 1966. When Audrey returned for a visit many years later, the National Spiritual Assembly greeted her as “Beloved Mother of our country.”

## Our Task

The stories of these “quickeners of mankind” who set out to win the goals of the Ten Year Crusade for Shoghi Effendi—in spite of their

own self-doubts, the loneliness they felt and the physical hardships and opposition they faced—serve as a potent reminder of the power of sacrificial effort. It is, in large part, because of them that we are where we are today. As the House of Justice wrote in its 26 March 2016 letter to Canada and the United States, “Your sister communities, so many of which you helped to establish, are now mature, and you stand with them ready to take on the sterner challenges that lie ahead. The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.”

These heroic Knights, along with other early teachers and pioneers, opened the “virgin territories” to the Faith. That was their work, their glory. Our task now is to extend the spiritual path they blazed, to deepen the conversations and relationships in the villages and neighbourhoods of those places as we reach out to the “widest possible cross-section of society and to all those with whom [we] share a connection—whether through a family tie or common interest, an occupation or field of study, neighbourly relations or merely chance acquaintance,” as the Universal House of Justice wrote, “so that all may rejoice in the appearance, exactly two hundred years before, of One Who was to be the Bearer of a new Message for humankind.”<sup>1</sup> How befitting to remember them, to recount their deeds and to draw inspiration from their sacrifices as we intensify our efforts at this historic moment between the two bicentenaries.

– Dr. Ann Boyles

This article draws on the book *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh* (George Ronald 2017), by Earl Redman, for its source material.

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 May 2016.

# Stories from Sydney

After making a trip across the world, representatives from Toronto and Vancouver have been sharing what they learned.



Five clusters, including Toronto and Vancouver, sent representatives to visit Sydney. The others were Gran Canaria (Spain), Midden (Netherlands) and London (United Kingdom).

## A priceless gift

This past April, 10 friends, including Counsellors Borna Noureddin and Shabnam Tashakour, journeyed to Sydney, Australia, to learn about the dynamics of a cluster working with large numbers. Toronto and Vancouver are two of 50 clusters

worldwide selected to participate in a pilot project of the International Teaching Centre, the purpose of which is to build capacity in clusters with approximately 200-300 core activities to sustain 500-1000.

These clusters, as well as a handful of others across Canada, have

reached the third milestone along the continuum of development. Friends in Sydney are “drawing on the potent instrument of the institute”<sup>1</sup> to achieve large-scale growth, sustaining 800 core activities and passing the fourth milestone. Prior to their departure, the friends representing Toronto and Vancouver consulted with others to articulate the questions they had about addressing large-scale growth.

In Sydney, the Canadian friends visited teaching teams, study circles and institute campaigns, coming together every evening to reflect on what they had learned. Members of institutions in Sydney gave presentations and were there to answer any questions that they had. A spirit of hospitality and of collective service and worship so permeated the cluster that the trip felt akin to pilgrimage.

Immediately upon their return, the representatives have been meeting with institutions, neighbourhood groups and teaching teams to begin the process of sharing what they learned with the rest of the community, including at this year’s National Convention. This article attempts to share some of the stories that emerged in a few gatherings across Toronto.

## Embracing large numbers

The strong unity of vision among the friends in Sydney was palpable. At one meeting, Ms. Tashakour shared, “The National Assembly, the Regional Bahá’í Councils, the institute board, the friends who were serving food...everyone had a vision of embracing large numbers. They were thinking about all 4.5 million of their population.” Their willingness to respond to the guidance of the House of Justice made them as one soul. This vision is, of course, implemented in the field of action.

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, *Ridván* 2019.

In the neighbourhood of Mount Druitt, a suburb of Sydney that is a centre of intense activity, approximately 50 friends have completed the entire sequence of Ruhi Institute courses, most of them youth. This has come about in large part through a regular pattern of institute campaigns. Tutors are raised up quickly – some in as little as nine months – many of whom are 18 or 19 years old and able to commit significant time to the process.

In Australia, every two months of school is followed by a two-week break, and in Sydney they have become adept at using these breaks to hold institute campaigns. When the Australian friends heard that young people in Canada are on break from school for months at a time in the summer, they were extremely positive about our possibilities for growth!

An orientation toward growth enabled the youth to meaningfully carry out the practice components of the institute. For example, a group of animators, many of them new, gathered to study the junior youth text *Glimmerings of Hope*, which discusses the concept of prayer. Rather than keeping this discussion at the conceptual level, they thought about how prayer could be taken to each of their families and to those they are connected to. As a result of this, 42 new devotionals began.

When thinking of those they are connected to, the friends in Sydney are encouraged to think not only of those they are close with, but of everyone in their community that they know by name. This welcoming attitude was evident at every gathering in which the friends from Canada were present.

Some of the most profound lessons were not about methods, but about the required attitudes for large-scale growth among those serving. Growth requires the ability to overlook the faults of others, so that disunity can't creep in. Although the Revelation is perfect, there is an understanding that mistakes will be made in bringing it into reality.

But the regularity of the campaigns means that there is always another chance to do things better.

Care was also taken regarding the number of Bahá'í friends serving in a centre of intense activity. This was because they did not want the population to feel as if they had to adapt to the current Bahá'í culture and way of doing things. As youth move through the sequence of courses and build capacity for service, Ms. Tashakour described, “the few pioneers create space for the emerging community to shape its own culture in light of the Teachings. This effects how the youth tutor.”

## Working with populations

Although much of the expansion work was carried out in neighbourhoods, teaching teams also focused on specific populations. In Sydney, there is a sizeable population of Chinese grandparents, many of whom relocated there to assist with the care of their grandchildren. These Chinese seniors are often connected to one another through various cultural associations and activities.

Regular contact with these friends was established when a local Chinese-language choir asked if they could use the Bahá'í Centre once a week for their practices. The Bahá'í teachers responded that yes, they could use the centre, but as it was a Bahá'í facility, could the Chinese choir please incorporate some Bahá'í songs into their repertoire? The choir was happy to do so and began practicing a few Bahá'í prayers in Mandarin. Later, when the group asked if they could use the centre for an additional day, the teachers agreed and invited them to start studying Ruhi Institute Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*. Again, the Chinese friends were happy to participate.

Currently, there are about 70 grandmothers and grandfathers studying institute courses in Sydney, many of them part of the choir that

sings Bahá'í prayers. These 70 are connected to many others. When they periodically hold a devotional gathering at the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney, in their own language, 500 of their friends attend. The Bahá'í teachers calculated that out of the 50,000 Chinese seniors in Sydney, they are connected to 10 per cent. Their aim is 100 per cent. That this vision of growth was held by many was particularly evident when a newer participant, limited in his use of English, turned to one of the visitors from Canada and asked, “Do you know about the Bahá'í Faith?”

## The spirit of the dawn-breakers

*The Dawn-Breakers* narrative is a continuing source of inspiration in the field of teaching. This was aptly demonstrated in the neighbourhood of West Mead, in Sydney. At the beginning of the current Plan, in 2016, the pioneers who had initiated the institute process in the neighbourhood left for various reasons. Soon, all the 20 core activities that had been sustained up to that point stopped. However, some fruits of their efforts remained: several graduates of the junior youth empowerment program.

“One of the youth,” Ms. Tashakour recounted, “gathered three of his friends who had just graduated from the program. They vowed to figure out if what the Bahá'ís brought them was real or not. The stories of the dawn-breakers and the guidance of the House of Justice had helped them to understand that the condition of the world requires a heroic response. They decided that they were going to meet all of their neighbours and bring them this process and see if it works. They knew with only four people no one could sit on the fence half-committed, so they resolved to give it their all. A 17-year-old and three 15-year-olds went out to conquer their neighbourhood. This was a real turning point for them and for their neighbourhood.”

It took a lot of time and dedication. Without the use of a car, they spent hours walking up and down streets trying to engage their neighbours, sustaining themselves with bags of pistachio nuts. But all the while they were supremely joyful in their efforts. The youth would read key paragraphs of the House of Justice's 29 December 2015 message line by line until they felt that they had managed to build the capacities required to move on to the next paragraph. At first, they tried to share a prayer with 70 people and all 70 declined.

When asked what motivated him to continue, one of the youth said he imagined Mulla Husayn riding on a horse behind him, armed with two swords, to reinforce his efforts. And although he knew that Mulla Husayn had been a small man, in his mind's eye he was six feet tall, muscular and with long black hair! Over time, through sustained effort, support, and God's confirmations, the activities again flourished.

The friends from Canada attended a children's festival in West Mead. There were 200 attendees, 50 of whom were already enrolled in children's classes. Plans were swiftly made to accompany some of the parents of the 150 children not yet involved in children's classes to provide for the spiritual education of their children. It was an evident reminder that we are a Cause of victors, even when faced with seemingly impossible odds.

## Institutional support

The institutions were proactive in understanding the community's needs for growth. For example, before the children's festival in West Mead, a Local Spiritual Assembly member participated in the team's weekly reflection space, and after hearing their plans, asked if it would assist them if the Assembly rented the hall for an additional day. The children, junior youth and youth then shared what they would use it for and were overjoyed that the community could gather for an additional day.



Two hundred children attended a festival in the neighbourhood of West Mead, in Sydney.

The institutions provided the teams with a wide degree of latitude as an expression of love, especially if they were doing something new. There was an understanding that refinement will come over time, but even so, friends weren't left to struggle by themselves. For example, during the children's festival described above, a tap leaked, and some flooding occurred. The Assembly quickly sent in a logistical team of friends to attend to this and the overall cleanliness of the hall, and the youth were able to focus on the festival itself.

The material means necessary for large-scale growth was also a distinctive aspect of what the visiting friends observed in Sydney. They have multiple properties, including residential facilities used during institute campaigns, and of course, the continental *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. They also own a fleet of vans, often used to transport youth to and from campaigns. Institute materials are free of charge and available to tutors 24 hours a day in a facility accessible by code. At devotional gatherings, mounds of prayer books reinforce the idea that all should have access to the Word of God. The institutions ensure that the material resources that are under their care, like the Funds of the Faith or in-kind contributions, are flowing to

the heart or engine of growth, which is the institute. Funds flow swiftly because those at the grassroots are trusted to access and spend them.

Spending time in Sydney helped the friends to gain conviction regarding possibilities for growth at home and broadened their vision. In time the insights being diffused in Toronto and Vancouver will permeate clusters throughout the entire country, especially as the friends apply them in the field of action – work that is already well underway.

The Canadian friends returned with a sense that time is fleeting, and an urgent response to the current condition of the world is required. The clusters of Toronto and Vancouver both set goals of reaching 500 core activities by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb and 1000 by the end of the current Five Year Plan. Ottawa has joined these clusters with a goal of reaching 810 core activities by the end of the Plan. Before they left Sydney, in looking at next steps, Neda Faramandpour said, "All the elements needed for large-scale growth are here." Matt Kianfar continued, "We felt that we had already won the goal, it's just about manifesting it."

of eagerness and strong resolve communicated in the message sent to us by the delegates to your National Convention,” the “delegates’ focused attention on the rich experience your community has accumulated and the path that lies immediately ahead”, noting the courageous effort required to “respond to the burgeoning receptivity amongst their compatriots through sustained and dynamic participation in the process of community building.”

This eagerness, resolve and focused attention permeated the Convention, from the first session when delegates began their consultations, inspired by the announcement in this year’s *Ridván* Message that the time has come for the Bahá’í world to build the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “in the vicinity of the Ridván Garden, on land consecrated by the footsteps of the Blessed Beauty.”<sup>1</sup> Awareness of the unique privilege accorded this generation of Bahá’ís to build this edifice was threaded throughout the Convention’s deliberations, which followed the broad theme of nurturing the seeds of growth through sessions on teaching the Faith, tending to the young generation, fostering spiritual health, and the spiritual and material dimensions of growth.

The joyful announcement by friends from the Winnipeg, Man. cluster that their community had just reached a new milestone with the establishment of 100 core activities contributed to the spirit of the gathering and a sense of building momentum. This spirit was further heightened and focused by a presentation by Counsellors Borna Noureddin and Shabnam Tashakour, and Ms. Hoda Farahmandpour, about their recent visit to Sydney, Australia. A group of 10 individuals from Toronto and Vancouver travelled as part of a pilot project guided by the International Teaching Centre, to learn from a cluster experiencing large-scale growth.

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, *Ridván* 2019.

# The 71<sup>st</sup> Canadian Bahá’í National Convention

During this year's Convention, the delegates deliberated on the potential for large-scale growth in Canada, focusing on the youth movement, the material means that will be required, and the spiritual qualities to be cultivated.



A delegate casts his ballot for the National Spiritual Assembly.

Photo: Liam Moore.

**T**he effects of the National Convention, held at the Toronto Bahá’í Centre from 26 to 29 April, were felt throughout Canada, as the delegates and participants dispersed throughout the land with a new vision of growth. A consciousness of the special potency of this time – the

eight cycles between the first and second bicentenary celebrations – was heightened by a presentation by a team of friends from Canada who had just returned from a visit to the Sydney cluster in Australia. In its response to the Convention’s message, the Universal House of Justice commented on the “sense

They described the spiritual and practical measures that the friends in Sydney have taken to create conditions where the first cluster in the West will soon achieve 1000 core activities that serve the populations of their neighbourhoods. First among them, they stated, is a commitment to study and apply, line by line, the guidance from the Universal House of Justice, pushing through challenges and confident in the process of learning in which the Bahá'í world is engaged. The friends working in the neighbourhoods in Sydney had learned how to foster an environment of encouragement and how to engage in a mode of learning. By strengthening a pattern of action that involved study, consultation, action and reflection, they are able to adjust and refine their actions without fear of obstacles or failure. The Counsellors commented that the characteristic of mutual support and assistance, drawing on each other to understand obstacles and build on strength, was a key to the ability of the friends to learn.

As the delegates consulted about the implications of Canada's strong history in light of the stories from Sydney, a new confidence emerged that through the limitless potentiality of the institute process, many clusters in Canada are ready to embrace large numbers. The examples and stories shared by the Counsellors and Ms. Farahmandpour served as a framework for delegates to share their own challenges and victories through a lens of hope for what their communities can accomplish leading up to the bicentenary and beyond. They particularly noted that the movement of a population requires confidence in Canada's diverse populations to trace a path toward Bahá'u'lláh that is their own. An example was cited by a delegate from British Columbia, who shared how a group of new friends in Vancouver organized their first seasonal school completely in their own language, assisted by the existence of a space in the Vancouver educational facility and with the support of their tutor.

In considering the needs of the rising generations, a delegate from Quebec shared the importance of meeting the logistical requirements of expansion and consolidation. "Every meal, every ride has so much significance," he said. He pointed out that in the book *Memorials of the Faithful*, about one third of the believers that 'Abdu'l-Bahá chronicled were those that carried out logistical tasks for the Faith. "We need to see how spiritually exalted it is to fulfil these needs, and I think if we see it this way then people will rush to take them on," he continued.

One of the stories from Sydney that captured the collective imagination of the delegates was the dedication of the youth to studying the narrative *The Dawn-Breakers*. When they ran out of hard copies of the text, they made sharable audio recordings of it.

On the morning of the third day of the Convention, news was shared of the unexpected passing of Mr. Donald Rogers, heroic teacher of the Faith, committed and distinguished servant whose range of services included as an Auxiliary Board member, a Continental Counsellor, a member of the International Teaching Centre and the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada. Many of those present in the room had been taught by Mr. Rogers or described having been confirmed by their association with him, and with assurance that his soul would be among those assisting the teaching from the next world, a prayer for the departed was recited.

In preparation for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, prayers in Mi'kmaq, Persian, French and English were read and chanted. In such a spiritually-charged atmosphere, the delegates rose and, one by one and with deep humility, cast their ballots.

The consultation then moved to the material needs of the Faith. The National Spiritual Assembly reported its happiness to note an almost doubling of budget submissions from the regions, evidence of growing capacity to gauge the

resources required to sustain the accelerated growth underway. The need for material resources was further reinforced by the vision of growth that the team that travelled to Australia brought to the Convention. Delegates consulted on the implications of large-scale growth and how to bring the insights shared from Sydney to their communities.

A delegate from Alberta shared, "We no longer talk about growth and then about the Fund...we want to promote growth and material needs are an integral part of that." Examples were shared of the role of the Fund in removing barriers to growth, from the acquisition of community properties to logistical support for junior youth and institute camps. These examples created a sense of determination to meet the needs of the Funds throughout Canada from the local to the national levels.

Immediately following the session, the outgoing National Spiritual Assembly and Counsellors consulted together over lunch. At the opening of the next session, the National Assembly quickly shared the news that, emboldened by the consultation, the National Spiritual Assembly had decided to add two million dollars to the contribution goal for the National Fund, so that the needs expressed by each of the regions, including the northern territories, could be met during this critical stage of the Five Year Plan. The delegates pledged to return to their communities and share both the material needs of this next stage and the sense of celebration that comes with responding to the growth taking place across the country.

In the following session, the tellers returned with the results of the election, sharing that there was 100 per cent participation from the delegates, and no spoiled ballots or votes. The newly elected members of the National Spiritual Assembly are Mehran Anvari, Deloria Bighorn, Hoda Farahmandpour, Gerald



Filson, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Karen McKye and Élizabeth Wright.

Among the questions posed to the delegates about devotional gatherings were what insights have been gleaned from experience with the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and how a community life that unites worship and service is being cultivated. Another question posed was how devotional gatherings and the joyous celebration of Holy Days are engaging the wider community in remembering their Creator in simple and intimate settings.

A delegate from the Atlantic Provinces shared: "Whenever we had growth in the community, it was always after sustained, regular devotional gatherings."

"Devotional gatherings for mothers and grandmothers are growing organically," a delegate from Nunavut continued, "In small communities, tragedy unites people. We believe in Pond Inlet that devotional gatherings lift spirits, restore hope and revitalize people."

A delegate from British Columbia added that "[U]nits of family and nuclei are emerging to strengthen the pattern of devotional life. They don't do it alone."

By the end of the Convention, several groups of delegates had already met to trace a plan of action to share with community members the remarkable spirit generated by the consultation at the Convention. In the closing comments, Ms. Shabnam Tashakour spoke of the relationship between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and drew a parallel of the love and faithfulness of that relationship and the quality of this two-year period

Children's artwork beautifies the Convention space (top, left); Counsellor Tashakour addresses the Convention (opposite, middle); Mr. Douglas Martin visits the Convention (opposite, left).

Photos: Liam Moore.



that separates the celebration of the bicentenaries of their Births. The National Assembly expressed its gratitude to the delegates and its confidence in the capacity of the community to reach out to Canada's diverse peoples, seeing them through the eyes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and in Canada's capacity to respond, with special mention of Indigenous populations and those of French Canadian descent. A call was issued, to let our homes become places where the peoples of this land encounter and become enthralled by the Word of God.

The final paragraph of the National Assembly's annual report commented:

"At the beginning of the Plan, the Universal House of Justice pointed out: 'Small steps, if they are regular and rapid, add up to a great distance travelled... In each cycle are vested fleeting opportunities for a stride forward, precious possibilities that will not return.'<sup>2</sup> The friends, already in motion and enkindled, accelerated their pace and looked in their surroundings for new paths to take, new friends to meet, new lives to enrich with the power of the Revelation. In increasing the intensity of their efforts, they have made enormous strides. In these remaining months until the celebration of the Twin Holy Days and beyond them to the end of the Plan, with eager anticipation of what the immediate future holds, the National Assembly's prayers are with you."

The delegates arose from the Convention, committed to making a stride forward in these precious days.

<sup>2</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ríyán 2019.



# The role of the nucleus in community development

Friends serving in three neighbourhoods across the country share their initial thoughts on the concept of an "expanding nucleus of individuals committed to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order."<sup>1</sup>

1 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ríqván 2010.

When Mr. Peterson first started serving as an animator in 2018, in Peterborough, Ont., the whole process was new to him. Recently retired and studying Ruhi Book 5: *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth* for the first time, he says he did not feel at all ready when their Auxiliary Board member encouraged his study circle to form a junior youth group. But, despite this hesitancy, he and a couple of the other participants decided to get the group going.

Several mothers in the neighbourhood and a few Bahá'í youth rallied around them in support, forming a nucleus, and together this "growing band of believers" was able to start a junior youth group. They began to meet regularly to think about how to extend the educational process further, reflecting on action and learning from experience. Soon, two new children's classes also formed. Now they are starting to see what it might look like for their nucleus to expand.

Several friends in the wider community have arisen to serve. Melissa Ghori, who works closely with the children's classes in the neighbourhood, explained, "If it wasn't for the mother we met after several days of outreach who was able to connect us with other people, or the community housing



A junior youth summer camp in the neighbourhood of Tillicum, in Saanich, B.C.

organizations who gave us space, or the people in our study circle who have been poised to help in any way, we wouldn't be where we are now. These are people we meet with regularly and who lend so much to the development of our activities."

Mr. Peterson says that although this is all very new for the Peterborough community, there is a space for

everyone in an expanding nucleus. Along with being an animator, he says that taking care of practical considerations to remove barriers for others is a key part of his service. "I can take care of little details so that young people busy with school no longer have to think about them and can just be there for the group," he shared. "We are so bound together in this common goal."

## Establishing a rhythm

*We rejoice to see that in a growing number of clusters, and in neighbourhoods and villages within them, a nucleus of friends has emerged who through action and reflection are discovering what is required, at a particular point, for the process of growth to advance in their surroundings.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Riqván 2019.

The Tillicum neighbourhood of Saanich, B.C., on Vancouver Island, was opened to the community-building process in 2013. Carmel Mohebati pioneered there after the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh became actively involved in organizing the celebrations, and soon after entered the institute process and became an animator. He is now arising to serve as a tutor and has started to attend the morning meetings of their nucleus.

Advancing the work has required initiating a rhythm of regular meetings. Ms. Mohebati says that, while her nucleus was meeting weekly for some time, they now meet daily at 8 a.m. to pray, reflect and study guidance. This, she said, has not only greatly increased their momentum, but has also deepened their friendships and sense of unity as a group. “When there’s more unity as a team, our efforts are stronger as well,” she explained. “It’s become so joyful when we get together.”

Before this development, the friends in Tillicum focused solely on their own individual activities, somewhat scattering their efforts. Functioning as a nucleus has expanded their vision. Since bringing in a system

of regular meetings, they have been able to see the educational process as one. With some members serving as junior youth animators, tutors or as devotional hosts, they have been able to see how these activities reinforce each other to create a dynamic community taking charge of its own spiritual and material development.

Through action, their nucleus is also expanding. A youth they met before the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh became actively involved in organizing the celebrations, and soon after entered the institute process and became an animator. He is now arising to serve as a tutor and has started to attend the morning meetings of their nucleus.

They are now starting to think about how to make long-term plans as a nucleus. By plotting out the long weekends and holidays leading up to the end of the current Five Year Plan, they have been able to identify more than 20 opportunities to hold institute campaigns of various lengths to raise up more resources. With trust in the nucleus and its supporters, Ms. Mohebati says lofty goals for the progress of the neighbourhood and its growing number of protagonists are not just possible, they’re practical.

## Fostering mutual support

*Raising up and accompanying an expanding nucleus of individuals in each place—not just at the level of the cluster but within neighbourhoods and villages—is at once a formidable challenge and a critical need. But where this is occurring, the results speak for themselves.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Riqván 2018.

In Côte-des-Neiges, a neighbourhood in Montreal established about eight years ago, the friends have been learning about the importance of strengthening their unity of vision. When Ezgi Ozyonum moved to the neighbourhood two years ago, a young couple had recently decided to open up their home once a week as a place where animators, children’s class teachers, tutors and devotional hosts could gather to plan their activities for the coming week, as well as for special events like Holy Days.

This helped them to accompany new friends met during the period leading up to the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. They found that those who are involved in more than one activity are more likely to stay engaged in and take ownership of the process. During home visits carried out in the context of the junior youth program, for example, they also studied prayers or sections of Ruhi Institute materials with the whole family.

Their weekly meeting space quickly blossomed into a place of mutual support. Aayah Amir, who pioneered to Côte-des-Neiges in 2016, says that these spaces have helped them to develop stronger friendships, which has in turn led to greater dedication to the work in the community. “As our relationships with one another deepened,” she explained, “we realized that our persistence increased.”

And as their nucleus expands, so does their circle of friends. By learning to love and sacrifice for one another, Ms. Ozyonum says that she has been able to extend this same level of friendship to her neighbours. “We share our food, we share our prayers,” she explained, “It contributes to all areas of our lives ... we don’t just talk about the program. We ask about their exams and their intellectual excellence because we see how these things are all connected. We care.”



Participants in an institute campaign in Brampton.

## Systematic striving: raising up neighbourhood youth

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Since 2015, friends serving in the neighbourhood of Springdale in the Brampton-Peel, Ont. cluster have been engaging youth through institute campaigns, accompanying them to arise to serve. Melanie Vafaie shares her thoughts on a recent campaign and the growth she has witnessed over this time.

The neighbourhood of Springdale was first opened in 2012 by six tutors and animators with a strong sense of mission, functioning as a nucleus of friends, “working and consulting together and arranging activities.”<sup>1</sup> In Springdale, we found high receptivity to the junior youth program, and within two cycles of growth were able to sustain around four groups with 30 participants. We soon realized that for more growth to occur, however, new animators would need to be raised up. We noticed that youth, usually teenagers, naturally rallied around the junior youth program. We began to engage them in institute campaigns, accompanying them to carry out the practice components. From these efforts, some arose to serve as animators.

When the 29 December 2015 message from the Universal House of Justice was released, it became our blueprint for expansion. We particularly noted one excerpt that said: “The institute process comes to be supported by a growing number of friends serving capably as tutors who, cycle after cycle, offer the full sequence of institute courses between them, at times with marked intensity. Thus, human resource development proceeds with minimal interruption and generates a constantly expanding pool of workers.”<sup>2</sup> This inspired us to further systematize the work.

We began using school holidays – the summer months, as well as March and Winter breaks – to hold institute campaigns and have continued this pattern every year. Through this strategy, we have been able to maintain a flow of youth moving through the Ruhi books and into the field of service. Since 2012, 139 youth have entered the study Ruhi Book 1: *Reflecting on the Life of the Spirit*. The participants are a combination of graduates from the junior youth program, friends and family of those in the process, and



The youth in Brampton longed to pray together and set many Bahá’í prayers and Writings to music.

youth met through outreach. Not all of them finish the book, but that’s okay. Currently, there are about 19 core activities in Springdale, over half of which are facilitated by youth who have been going through the institute.

Each cycle, we offer a new Ruhi Book 1 to any youth close to the activities, and all existing study circles use the campaign as an opportunity to advance further through the courses. Our homes function much like institute buildings during these campaigns, with groups breaking off to study in various rooms.

Our most recent campaign, which took place over five wintery days during March Break, was the first time Ruhi Book 6: *Teaching the Cause* was studied with a group of youth from the neighbourhood. Alongside this, there were groups studying Ruhi Book 4: *The Twin Manifestations*, Ruhi Book 2: *Arising to Serve* and, as with every campaign, a group studying Ruhi Book 1, creating a total of 30 participants. One of the tutors facilitating the Book 1 study circle was a neighbourhood youth who had studied the book on multiple occasions and is now accompanying a group of his friends through it.

This atmosphere of the campaign was greatly bolstered by taking

place during the period of the Fast. Every morning, the tutors and some participants gathered for breakfast and dawn prayers. Five friends were participating in the Fast for the first time and the space helped everyone feel supported.

Home visits, organized by tutors closely connected to the families in the neighbourhood, were scheduled every day of the campaign for the participants to converse with their neighbours about what they were learning. They also hosted a community gathering, where they prepared a devotional, shared songs as well as key pieces of learning from each book with the families who joined them for the evening.

We are constantly learning about how to create environments where participants take ownership of the process. Having gained some insights into this question, the spiritual atmosphere fostered during this campaign was that of deep devotion and drawing on the Word of God. Each study circle was dedicated to memorizing the prayers and Writings in their books, and they often wrote melodies to assist with this, and taught their songs to the larger group.

The youth longed to pray together. Their reverence and involvement in

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

2 Ibid.



The youth, many of who serve as junior youth animators, deepened their understanding of the concept of teaching the Faith.

collective prayer strengthened daily, to the point that on the last day of the campaign, all the participants were late to their visits because they were so focused on their prayers. This increased devotion has spread beyond the campaign and has enhanced the quality of an existing weekly devotional.

The youth encouraged one another to share their reflections each day and to listen with humility and love, helping each other fully participate in the campaign. It was clear that the spiritual atmosphere was cultivated by each participant, not solely the tutors. "Prayer can directly influence you and how you treat others," reflected one participant of Ruhi Book 1. "The more prayer you have in your life the closer you will be with God and enhance your spiritual qualities."

Those of us facilitating the groups reflected every night on the environ-

ment of the campaign, as well as the movement of participants – individually and as a cohort – through their respective books. This allowed us to make logistical modifications as required and to offer support to tutors facing challenges. After one such reflection, we introduced daily journals for the participants to write in to assist them with their visits. This helped them to be thoughtful in what they were sharing and encouraged those who were shy to participate. The participants experienced the joy of teaching by carrying out the practical components of the books, holding visits with families in the neighbourhood and youth in the sequence who, for various reasons, could not participate in the campaign. They advanced in their capacity to have meaningful conversations and, in their final reflections, the participants were asked to think about how their understanding advanced and how it now could be applied to their lives.

A participant in Book 4 said : "I feel like now I have a more profound understanding of the Báb in general; before it was just His name and that He came before Bahá'u'lláh. Now I've learned more about His past and how steadfast He has been in the Cause, in His belief and spreading the Message. To apply this, I must be determined in what I'm trying to do; I tend to be lazy, so if I'm more determined like the Báb, even five per cent would be good!"

Another participant shared an experience after her first day of studying Ruhi Book 1. She said she felt very calm that evening, went home and created a document listing all that she had learned and was now going to try to put into practice. Then, one of her friends she had been arguing with texted, "Let's repair our friendship." She forgave her and shared what she had been learning.

The following three reflections are from a few of the participants of Book 6, who had been spending their evenings home visiting friends:

"Studying Book 6 helped me understand the importance of teaching, and how it can benefit both the teacher and the person being taught... it's crucial to use the information we have been given, even if it's just a little bit, because it's selfish to keep it to yourself. I will apply what I have learned by teaching more."

"Every time I go on visits now it'll be important to keep in mind the way we talk to people with love and looking at it as unlocking the gates to the city of the human heart ."

"Always try [to teach], because you wouldn't want to deprive them of spiritual knowledge."

It has been a privilege for us to observe the power of the institute process in building capacity. We've learned that it is not us raising up these youth, but rather they arise through continuous and regular opportunities for their hearts to interact with the Word of God and apply it to both their lives and the betterment of the community. Through this process we are now seeing the determination and devotion with which each generation more capably nurtures the spiritual seeds that have been planted by the Blessed Beauty.

As one animator said, "Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb planted the seed. Each generation has to water this seed, continue to nurture it and let it grow."

– Melanie Vafaie



Youth from Brampton, Ont. travelled to Niagara, Ont., to support their friends in starting a junior youth group.

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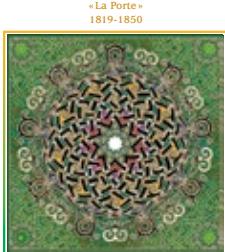
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# The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

"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 <www.bahaifunds.ca> Online Contribution System. The individual's Bahá'í identification number must be provided on all payments.

**Payments should not be made through a Local Spiritual Assembly.**

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

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