

BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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**Releasing the
society-building power
of the Faith**

From the Writings

Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 339.

O children of men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 68.

Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people...

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 297.

All praise be unto Thee, O Lord my God! I beseech Thee by such souls as are eagerly waiting at Thy gate and by those holy beings who have attained the court of Thy presence, to cast upon us the glances of Thy tender compassion and to regard us with the eye of Thy loving providence. Cause our souls to be enkindled with the fire of Thy tender affection and give us to drink of the living waters of Thy bounty. Keep us steadfast in the path of Thine ardent love and enable us to abide within the precincts of Thy holiness.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 298-9.

O God, my God! Illumine the brows of Thy true lovers, and support them with angelic hosts of certain triumph. Set firm their feet on Thy straight path, and out of Thine ancient bounty open before them the portals of Thy blessings; for they are expending on Thy pathway what Thou hast bestowed upon them,

safeguarding Thy Faith, putting their trust in their remembrance of Thee, offering up their hearts for love of Thee, and withholding not what they possess in adoration for Thy Beauty and in their search for ways to please Thee.

O my Lord! Ordain for them a plenteous share, a destined recompense and sure reward.

Verily, Thou art the Sustainer, the Helper, the Generous, the Bountiful, the Ever-Bestowing.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 331.

And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.

God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 263.

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ON THE COVER Leading up to the global conference in Grand Forks, B.C., a local artist painted a mural on a highly-visible building in town incorporating a quote from Bahá'u'lláh.

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Regarding progress on the construction of the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 4 July 2022.

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice wishes to inform you of the progress that has been made in recent weeks with regard to the construction of the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Following the fire in early April, the construction site for the Shrine was closed. This was to allow for a thorough investigation of the cause of the fire and its immediate impact, which has now concluded and confirmed that the fire was the result of an accident. Accordingly, the insurance claim for all losses incurred is proceeding well.

While construction work on the areas unaffected by the fire has continued, the site has only recently been reopened for the cleaning of the affected areas. Although the structures are fundamentally sound, to ensure that the project meets the highest standard of excellence and the design intent is fully realized, extensive testing has commenced to ascertain which parts either require repair or need to be replaced. Determination of the nature of this remedial work for some parts of the floor, walls, and columns involves close consultation with the project’s structural engineers and review by external experts.

While no exact date for the conclusion of the project had been set, it is recognized that the accident will result in a substantial delay in the completion of the final resting place of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. However, it will not require a higher level of contributions than had already been announced.

– With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat



Construction of the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues to advance following the fire caused by an accident in April. The cleaning is set to be completed in the coming days. Photo: Bahá’í World News Service

Message to the Bahá'ís in Iran

To the sore-tried and faithful followers of the Beloved of the world in the Cradle of the Faith, 23 August 2022.

Dear spiritual sisters and brothers, bearers of the Trust of God and protectors of the precious Cause of the Abhá Beauty,

Reports received from the sacred land of Iran attest the intensification of the unrelenting injustice and cruelty which, from the time of the appearance of the first effulgence of the Sun of Truth above the horizon of that land until the present day, have been endured by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that country. The news tells of all types of discrimination and of assaults on the most basic civil rights of the Bahá'ís, including the arrests of innocent people and subjecting them to great pressures, attacks on the dignity and the private homes of Bahá'í citizens, the confiscation of their property and belongings and the destruction of their houses, the denial of higher education to Bahá'í youth, and even instances of individuals being prevented from earning a livelihood. Alas, a thousand times alas, that ignorant prejudices and ingrained malice have so possessed the hearts of some of those in authority that they have entirely abandoned truth and reality and, resorting to the use of force and relying on their ranks and positions, they have spread out an array of oppression and tyranny, of greed and avarice. Not only have they robbed the Bahá'ís in that land of their undisputed rights but—by spreading untruths and calumnies against the community to which no informed and fair-minded person any longer pays heed, and by making empty and unfounded accusations, not a single meaningless and self-contradictory word of which any sound mind takes seriously—they have also undermined and damaged their own reputation and credibility in the eyes of the public. What is there except prejudice, bigotry, malice, and enmity that can thus extinguish understanding and reason and motivate the advancement of claims so untenable and specious that they would fail to deceive even a child, let alone the astute and perceptive people of Iran? Deceit and slander on such a scale are a grievous sin, and these false and irrational claims are a grave insult to the understanding and intelligence of the inhabitants of Iran and a mockery in the face of all the people of the world.

In this regard, the recent events in Mázindarán, which are in fact the continuation of a persecution that the friends in that region have endured for many a long year, have been so odious and brazen this time that truly they not only deeply distressed the inhabitants of Iran, but they also offended the minds of the people of the world and made a

profound impression upon public opinion the world over. Images of those homeless and afflicted ones awakened the conscience of thousands upon thousands of souls, and their groans and sighs brought on the lamentation of their compatriots. The broken hearts of those wronged ones weighed heavy on the heart of every conscientious person and filled it with pain and sorrow. The tears staining the cheeks of those innocent children also flowed from the eyes of countless viewers in the farthest reaches of the earth. This great injustice led to an unprecedented reaction in news media around the world within a very short time and resulted in unparalleled expressions of support from your noble countrymen, which were plainly evident online. The events of Mázindarán became a symbol of all the injustices that have been and continue to be perpetrated against the community of the Greatest Name throughout that country. Such support from other Iranians in defence of the trampled rights of that oppressed community is of immense importance. Perhaps for the younger generation, who have witnessed in the course of their lives an ever-increasing awareness on the part of their compatriots, this may not be as striking, but those who recall the conditions in years gone by and the dominant atmosphere of society in former times and who remember the widespread separation and lack of awareness—they view with wonder and astonishment the daily more pronounced awakening of the noble people of that land, a people whose culture has always respected human dignity and equality. They marvel at how, in so short a space of time, so profound a change has become possible, and how, among a large number of Iranians, the true aims of the Bahá'ís and their affection for that sacred land have become known, their principles and beliefs have been better understood, and the nature of their endeavours in service to society and for the establishment of the oneness of the world of humanity, which is the foundation of all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, has become evident and clearly demonstrated.

O friends of the Beloved! Consider the recent events. Observe how in response to this manifest injustice, which can evoke rage and rebelliousness in a person, not a trace of vengefulness is to be found in those pure hearts, those souls who have ever been immersed in the ocean of such tribulations. Rather, their attempts to obtain justice are through recourse to the law, and their appeals are made to those in authority. The Bahá'ís seek justice and long for fairness and equity, but never pursue retaliation and revenge. Their hearts are filled with pain, but wholly free of hatred and rancour. They are anxious, but their kindness and love are boundless. They have straitened means, but magnanimous characters and lofty aims. They are driven out of their homes, but are a shelter and refuge to others. They are caught in the snares of the malicious, but their spirits soar aloft. They are wronged, but are the well-wishers of those that wrong them. They

raise their children not to engage in violence and conflict, but to show forth kindness and forgiveness, so that they may not harm an ant, much less a man. Those wronged ones console their burning hearts through faith in the Ancient Beauty and through the counsels of Him Who, by the hand of His own power, reared and nurtured their spiritual forebears in those regions. He forbade conflict and contention and taught them in words such as these: “The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity.”

Of the friends in Iran, trained by the hand of the Lord Himself, no less can be expected. But know truly that in this turbulent world of afflictions, in which the people are weary of violence and abhor it, especially when carried out in the name of religion—in such a world, were a person to observe with a pure eye unclouded by prejudice, the conduct and example of the Bahá’í community in Iran would be sufficient evidence and abiding proof of Bahá’u’lláh’s miracle and of the immense power of His sacred Cause to unify and promote peace. Through your adherence to His teachings and your behaviour and conduct, you have proven the practicability of the construction of a diverse and unified, ever-advancing and dynamic society and have demonstrated the reality of the effulgence of spiritual qualities and virtues in the world of humanity. Well done, a thousand times well done! This is the true meaning of the religion of God. This is eternal distinction and everlasting honour. Do not underestimate this great bounty and have no doubt regarding the exalted rank of those who are the true promoters of peace and reconciliation, nor regarding the lofty station of the sincere lovers of the world of humanity.

By the same token, it is befitting of the historic transformation that has taken place in the minds of so many of the people of Iran that you who tread the path of God should focus your efforts and your energies on the vital task of ever more greatly exemplifying the divine counsels in this radiant age. You strive to strengthen spiritual bonds within your communities and to increase unity, harmony, and solidarity. You encourage, assist, and appreciate each other in all your services and do not allow the profound unity of your community or the heartfelt connections among all its members to be susceptible to the least weakening, however brief. Beloved friends! In the midst of these events, bring hope to your countrymen’s hearts. Be a source of consolation to every burdened soul and of confidence to every weary heart. Care sincerely for everyone and bring solace to every helpless one. Heal the pains of others and thereby ease your own pain. And before Almighty God ask forgiveness for those who commit iniquity against you, and pray fervently that the dross of prejudice and ignorance may be cleansed from their hearts.

Throughout the world your sisters and brothers, who pride themselves in their spiritual bonds of kinship with such heroic souls, constantly call you to mind in their daily and special prayers and beseech the divine Throne that the countless instances of prejudice, persecution, and discrimination that you face may cease. Bahá’í communities the world over are exerting great effort to inform their governments and to awaken their peoples to what you have suffered and are still enduring. We, too, remember you at every turn and pray ardently on your behalf at His Threshold.

– The Universal House of Justice



Stones on the path in the gardens at Bahjí. Photo: Bahá’í International Community

Regarding Canada's pioneer goals

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 7 July 2022.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On 24 May 2022, the Universal House of Justice issued this stirring call to the Bahá'ís of the world:

Confident of the community's appreciation of the significance of this historical juncture and in its capacity to respond to the demands of the hour, we now call on the friends to consider how they can contribute to the pioneering imperatives of the Nine Year Plan—both on the home front and in the international field. In preparing to enter this vital arena, they will find the counsels of the institutions indispensable. As they arise to shed abroad ever more widely the divine fragrances, the words of the Guardian to the followers of the Blessed Beauty some seven decades ago at the opening of the World Crusade will no doubt resound in their ears: “Light as the spirit,’ ‘pure as air,’ ‘blazing as fire,’ ‘unrestrained as the wind’—for such is Bahá'u'lláh's own admonition to His loved ones in His Tablets, and directed not to a select few but to the entire congregation of the faithful—let them scatter far and wide, proclaim the glory of God's Revelation in this Day, quicken the souls of men and ignite in their hearts the love of the One Who alone is their omnipotent and divinely appointed Redeemer.”

The National Assembly promised to share with you the details of our international responsibilities once the specific countries requiring pioneers had been identified by the Universal House of Justice.

That moment has come. Beyond ensuring the flow of pioneers on our home front, Canada has been asked to raise at least 28 pioneers from our advanced clusters to be dispatched as early as possible in the first four-year phase of the Nine Year Plan to Belize, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Dominica, Estonia, Greenland, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, the Leeward Islands, Lithuania, Morocco, and Tunisia. In addition, we have been asked to offer ongoing support to these clusters. The National Assembly is in consultation with the Counsellors to identify these teams of pioneers, whose experience in contributing to the movement of a cluster past the third milestone in Canada will now serve our sister communities around the world.

Dear friends, though not every believer is called or able to directly contribute to this goal as a pioneer, the endeavour is truly a collective one in which all can participate. The first and most immediate way is clear: new levels of support for the Deputization Fund will be needed to help pioneers settle internationally and on the home front, and to support the movement of travelling teachers and institute resource persons. In the 24 May 2022 message to the Bahá'ís of the world, the House of Justice noted that “National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Bahá'í Councils in the countries from which pioneers are expected to arise bear a special responsibility to facilitate this movement and to offer support to the goal clusters, such as by facilitating visits by travelling teachers and institute resource persons, or connecting active participants in a pioneer's new community to the process of learning under way in the advanced clusters in their country.” This ongoing support and connection between clusters is a new feature of this Plan, and the House of Justice has said that as the implementation of the Plan progresses and as we learn to support developments in other countries, the House of Justice may assign additional pioneering goals.

Thus, by continuing to build strength on the home front and settling pioneers to strengthen the most advanced clusters in Canada as well as in those that will move towards the third milestone in the early years of the Nine Year Plan, we build a strong foundation for our continued connection with clusters in other countries.¹ The determination of the friends to walk a path of service, see themselves as pioneers in their own neighbourhoods and clusters and widen their embrace by engaging neighbours and friends, nurtures the very conditions from which progress springs and generations of pioneers emerge. This is a very practical expression of the words of the House of Justice, speaking of Bahá'u'lláh's admonition “directed not to a select few but to the entire congregation of the faithful”, uniting the entire company of the friends who seek to teach His Cause, to learn about building vibrant communities and to release the society-building powers of the Faith in ever greater measures.

We ask you to share this message with your communities, dear friends, and invite their ardent prayers for this mighty, historic endeavour.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

¹ For a current list of these homefront goals, please write to either the National Pioneer Desk at pioneer@bahai.ca or the Pioneer Task Forces of the Ontario and British Columbia Bahá'í Councils at pioneering@ontariobahai.org and pioneering@bc.bahai.ca.

Call for special prayers for the friends in Iran

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 23 August 2022.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As you know, in recent weeks the news of intensified persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran has grieved the hearts not only of Bahá'ís but has “offended the minds of the people of the world and made a profound impression upon public opinion the world over”¹. The Office of Public Affairs has been actively pursuing several lines of action to obtain media coverage and garner support for our coreligionists from government and civil society. We have been heartened by the Canadian response to date, described in part in an article released by the Bahá'í International Community.² Of note, the Government of Canada reacted to the news of this fresh wave of persecution by commenting on Twitter on July 23rd and August 3rd. We invite you to follow @CanadaBahai and the Bahá'í International Community's account @BahaiBIC to stay abreast of media coverage and statements from government officials and civil society. For publicly available and verified information, please refer to press releases issued by the Bahá'í International Community.³

In its soul-stirring message addressed today to “the sore-tried and faithful followers of the Beloved of the world in the Cradle of the Faith”, which can be found at the URL in the footnote below, the Universal House of Justice assures them:

“Throughout the world your sisters and brothers, who pride themselves in their spiritual bonds of kinship with such heroic souls, constantly call you to mind in their

daily and special prayers and beseech the divine Throne that the countless instances of prejudice, persecution, and discrimination that you face may cease. Bahá'í communities the world over are exerting great effort to inform their governments and to awaken their peoples to what you have suffered and are still enduring. We, too, remember you at every turn and pray ardently on your behalf at His Threshold.”

*We call on all the friends
to honour this promise,
matching the mounting
afflictions by intensifying
their daily prayers . . .*

We call on all the friends to honour this promise, matching the mounting afflictions by intensifying their daily prayers, and through a wave of special devotional gatherings that draw in the well-wishers of humanity, many of whom have been at their sides in the global conferences.

Kindly share this call with all the friends in your communities, that every household where the Greatest Name is invoked may play its part in awakening the world to this grievous injustice, and to our fellow-believers' noble response.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the sore-tried and faithful followers of the Beloved of the world in the Cradle of the Faith, 23 August 2022.

² This article can be found at the following link: <https://www.bic.org/news/three-weeks-iran-200-incidents-bahais-being-targeted-international-community-roundly-condemns-sweeping-crackdown>

³ Press releases can be accessed through the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/yvwy399h>

National Spiritual Assembly's response to the collective recommendations of the National Convention

On the afternoon of 29 April 2022, delegates assembled at Canada's 72nd National Convention — the first Convention since the onset of the global health crisis — with a powerful sense of the historic nature of the gathering. A year of reflection about the life of the beloved Master and the Covenant of which He was the Centre had just concluded, and the first phase of the Nine Year Plan, itself the first in a new series of Plans, had begun. The Convention was also the first in the sixth epoch of the Formative Age, announced in the Riḍván 2022 message, and the first in the third epoch of the Master's Divine Plan, described in the Riḍván 2021 message.

This consultation brought the Assembly great joy, inspired as it was by the determination and longing of the friends to advance along the path of a dynamic, flourishing devotional life...

It is small wonder that from the first moments of the Convention, amid so many “firsts”, a spirit of joy, focus and intensity permeated the discussions.

At a recent meeting, the National Spiritual Assembly was delighted to review the rich and varied consultation on the theme of teaching the Cause, addressing questions that had been drawn from the messages of the Universal House of Justice. The Assembly gave special attention to the collective recommendations that reflected a general agreement among the delegates present.

The collective recommendations were as follows:

- 1. That the National Assembly review its contribution goals for 2022–2023 with an eye to increasing the goals for both the National and the Deputization Funds, to ensure that the resources are in hand at the beginning of the Plan for the momentous tasks ahead.*

The stimulating consultation that inspired this recommendation was rooted in a profound awareness of current priorities, and this statement from the Riḍván Message: “And at the threshold of a new, mighty undertaking, this united body of believers stands ready to seize the possibilities wide open before it.” After careful review of the needs on the homefront and our new responsibilities abroad, the contribution goal for the National Fund was increased by \$100,000 to \$6,100,000 and the Deputization Fund contribution goal was increased by \$200,000 to \$700,000.

- 2. That the National Assembly ask the Universal House of Justice what would be needed for a House of Worship to be established in Canada during this Plan...*

This consultation brought the Assembly great joy, inspired as it was by the determination and longing of the friends to advance along the path of a dynamic, flourishing devotional life to the formal establishment of a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*. Great strides have been made in enhancing the devotional character of the community, particularly since the beginning of the Five Year Plan. Since April 2016, the number of devotional gatherings has increased almost five-fold, from 1,200 to 5,800, and regular participation in them has grown from 2,800 to 18,500. New capacities have developed as a result, as the friends learn to extend invitations more broadly and not only to share prayers in these sacred spaces but also foster profound conversations, introducing the attendants to the community-building efforts and inviting them to participate.

The National Assembly felt that the most pressing step for us to take as a community in preparation for the establishment of a House of Worship is to continue to focus on family prayers and devotional gatherings, and to

As the Assembly reviewed the recommendation about Canada's Indigenous populations alongside guidance about the nature of a learning process, we concluded that our next step will be to consult further with a number of friends who are engaged at the grassroots...

continue to strengthen the related capacities. To deepen understanding of the significance of the institution of the Mashriq'l-Adhkar and the relationship to its current embryonic form in our communities and neighbourhoods, we also call for a study of the compilation about the Mashriq'l-Adhkar, released in September 2017¹.

At the same time, we wished to assure the community that we are working on a master site plan, which has been shared with the Universal House of Justice, to ensure that when the time comes for Canada to establish its first House of Worship, we are ready.

3. That the National Assembly give renewed attention to a learning process about reaching Canada's Indigenous populations, including creating a mechanism or space to systematically support the dissemination of learning about this historically significant population.

As was shared with the delegates at the Convention, the National Assembly and the Counsellors have had a dynamic and ongoing consultation about the vital issue of the advancement of the Cause and the release of its society-building powers in receptive and historically significant populations, including Canada's Indigenous peoples. As the Assembly reviewed the recommendation about Canada's Indigenous populations alongside guidance about the nature of a learning process, we

concluded that our next step will be to consult further with a number of friends who are engaged at the grassroots, so that we have a clearer national picture of the current reality to aid the Assembly's further consultation with the Counsellors. We were moved by the accounts of delegates with long dedication to this work, stories of crisis and victory: a process of learning benefits from understanding both the heartbreak and the successes. It is particularly important at this stage to identify strengths on which to build. In every region there are examples of advances of the training institute, of budding endeavours in social action and of contributions to the discourses of society in Indigenous contexts, and the learning emerging from this experience needs to be disseminated more widely. For instance, we will wish to analyze the experience described by two delegates who reported the sustained engagement of over 150 Indigenous families in the community-building work in just two neighbourhoods in British Columbia. We noted, too, that at least ten global conferences in Canada were or will be especially focussed on Indigenous communities or neighbourhoods. It brings us particular joy to share that the dubbing of the film *Dawn of the Light*, undertaken by the National Assembly with the assistance of the friends in Nunavut, has just been completed and was ready in time for the conference in Iqaluit. The decision about what kind of additional mechanism or space is needed will thus be based on an analysis of both the history and the current reality of this work.

4. That the National Assembly offer specialized human resources and reflection spaces, to aid Local Spiritual Assemblies in their efforts to create spiritually empowering environments that support the friends' efforts to adhere to Bahá'í law.

This helpful recommendation arose out of a consultation about the spiritual health of the community in a challenging age, and a question that the National Assembly had raised: "How are Assemblies learning to create the spiritually uplifting environment ... that supports the efforts of individuals to uphold Bahá'í law? What are the challenges?" In response to the recommendation, the Assembly noted that in several arenas – spiritual health, expansion and consolidation and social action – we have decided to focus on a learning process that draws on those regions or localities with the most experience, or who are working with larger numbers. This approach appears well suited to this recommendation, and we will begin to explore ways that this need can be met through consultation with a few Assemblies who have the most varied experience on which to draw.

¹ Available at the Bahá'í Reference Library <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/institution-mashriq-l-adhkar/1#250953299>.

Participation in public demonstrations and in social media

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies and Registered Groups, 30 September 2022.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In recent months, news emanating from Iran has highlighted the continued injustice faced by many people in that land, including our fellow Bahá'ís. The renewed waves of persecution afflicting the Bahá'ís have ignited another global outcry of opposition to the government's senseless oppression of its own people. Our Office of Public Affairs has been in regular communication with the Government of Canada and Members of Parliament to ensure that Canada's voice is also heard among the community of nations that uphold the fundamental rights of Bahá'ís in Iran.

Amid this months-long crackdown against Bahá'ís across the country, a wider wave of protest has erupted. Prompted by the arrest and subsequent death of an innocent young woman, these protests against the government have spread rapidly in Iran and around the world. A recent letter written to an individual on behalf of the Universal House of Justice noted “the earnest outburst of emotions and the poignant cry from the heart on the part of the masses of people who seek justice and equality fill every fair-minded observer with deep grief and concern.”¹ At the same time, the protests have generated heightened emotions and a politically volatile environment that must be navigated by Bahá'ís with prudence and wisdom.

The principles that must guide our actions in political matters are well-known to you. Bahá'ís “endeavour to uphold the standard of justice, addressing inequities directed towards them or towards others,” the Universal House of Justice reminds us in its 2 March 2013 letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran. Bahá'ís “will not affiliate themselves with political parties, become entangled in partisan issues, or participate in programmes tied to the divisive agendas of any group or faction.” In another letter, the House of Justice observes that Bahá'ís are “of course free to offer expressions of sympathy and solidarity with the efforts of the people of Iran to seek justice and equity so essential for the progress of their nation. Yet, as you are surely aware, Bahá'ís should refrain from being drawn into matters and activities that assume a partisan political character or degenerate into violence.”² One of the challenges in relation to the current public demonstrations is the extent to which many are linked to a call for the overthrow of government, something that

a Bahá'í would not do or support. In a time of political turmoil, it is essential that we hold fast to the principle of non-involvement in politics, with confidence that it will allow us to express our hope and vision for a future society with greater clarity and attractiveness to those searching for solutions.

We note that friends and institutions have raised additional questions regarding the implications of this principle for participation in online spaces of discourse, such as social media. Indeed, the discussion on social media of matters pertaining to Iran is, as the House of Justice has written, an area of particular sensitivity about which we should be especially on guard. “Observing strict caution in this respect is essential for the protection of the sorely tried community in Iran.”³ Even “liking” or promoting a particular post has implications in this regard. As the letter dated 1 December 2019⁴ notes, the world of social media offers special challenges: “The unparalleled ease with which a person can join in such public debate and the nature of the technology make momentary lapses of judgement and incautious actions more likely and their residue more enduring.” We urge all the friends to set aside time to study this letter, alone and with others, whether or not they have previously done so.

In its 25 November 2020 letter to the Bahá'ís of the world, the Universal House of Justice placed the global health crisis in a broader context:

Your resilience and your unwavering commitment to the well-being of those around you, persistent through all difficulties, have filled us with tremendous hope. But it is no wonder that, in some other quarters, hope has become a depleted resource. There is a mounting realization on the part of the world's people that the decades ahead are set to bring with them challenges among the most daunting that the human family has ever had to face. The current global health crisis is but one such challenge, the ultimate severity of whose cost, both to lives and livelihoods, is yet unknown; your efforts to succour and support one another as well as your sisters and brothers in society at large will certainly need to be sustained, and in places expanded.

The letter then outlines the features of the One Year Plan, and continues:

For the present hour, we urge you to recommit your energies, keeping your focus on the mission immediately before you. We are immensely gratified to see the assured composure with which the community of the Greatest Name has sought to offer the divine remedy under all conditions, especially during this

¹ From a letter dated 27 September 2022, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.

² Ibid

³ From a letter dated 1 December 2019, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

⁴ This message can be accessed online at www.bahai.org

period when society's established patterns of life have been disrupted and risks of different kinds are being faced by so many. Withal, the friends must guard against being drawn into the ultimately futile conflict and strife that characterizes so much of the discussion of the affairs of society, or—heaven forbid—allowing interaction of this type to permeate, even fleetingly, the conversations of the community. Yet such vigilance on your part in avoiding discord and in not becoming entangled in society's controversies should under no circumstances be construed as aloofness from the many pressing concerns of this time. Far from it. You are among the most active and earnest of humanity's well-wishers. But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first, in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.

Capacity has been growing in every community to engage in meaningful, profound conversation that gives access to such a vision to our collaborators, families and friends. Through the friends' participation in the training institute, their ongoing study of guidance, and applying what is being learned in their conversations in varied settings, the flow of unerring guidance to humanity from the Universal House of Justice is reaching a wider and wider circle of the well-wishers of humanity. The passages above describe the environment we seek to create, and the spirit with which we participate in these conversations, conducive to finding precious points of unity. As the community takes these counsels to heart and applies them, their ardent longing to see change in the world will bear the sweetest fruit.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Regarding the new reservation system for visiting the Montreal Shrine

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils, and Registered Groups, 3 October 2022.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We would be grateful for your assistance in informing your communities of the implementation of a new reservation system for visitors to the Bahá'í Shrine in Montréal. Those wishing to visit the Shrine are asked to book a time to visit through the following link, ideally in advance of their arrival date: <https://calendly.com/sanctuaire-montreal-shrine/rdv-appointment>. If visitors have not been able to book a time in advance, a guide will be able to do so for them on arrival. The baha.ca website will be updated shortly to include the link to the new reservation system.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada



The Bahá'í Shrine in Montreal, Canada. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed in this home during his visit to Montreal.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community

About this issue

In its 30 December 2021 message, the Universal House of Justice explained that building a society that works for the betterment of the world “means learning how to raise up vibrant, outward-looking communities; it means those communities learning how to bring about spiritual and material progress; it means learning how to contribute to the discourses that influence the direction of that progress...” It continues, “Together, they are means of releasing what the Guardian described as ‘the society-building power’ of the Faith.”

As the title of this issue suggests, in the pages of *Bahá’í Canada* and on the website, we aspire to share stories that touch on all these areas of endeavour and hope to contribute to an ongoing understanding of what the House of Justice has called on us to do and be.

This year’s National Convention, the first to take place in three years, was a significant occasion for consultation on the progress of the Bahá’í Faith in Canada and the imperatives of the Nine Year Plan.¹ For this issue, the National Assembly has contributed written responses to the collective recommendations put forward by the assembled delegates. These can help bring the deliberations of this institution closer to the hearts and minds of the friends.

International and home front pioneering has come to the fore during the current Plan, as the House of Justice has called for the emergence of at least one milestone three cluster in every country and region in the world. In this issue, we have included excerpts from a booklet about Marion Jack, lauded by the Guardian as an “immortal heroine” and “shining example to pioneers.” She lived in Bulgaria for 23 years as a pioneer, where she was laid to rest. Canada has recently been called to continue this legacy, Bulgaria being one among 14 countries identified as pioneering destinations for Canada.²

On the Bahá’í Canada website, there are two stories contributed by the newly-formed pioneering task forces in British Columbia and Ontario about the first orientations that have taken place in Canada for those interested in contributing to the pioneering goals. A shift in thinking about pioneering—from an individual activity to a collective enterprise that calls for the worldwide dissemination of insights—is described. These articles can be accessed at www.bahaicanada.bahai.ca.

The feature articles for this issue focus on several of the global conferences that occurred across the country. These stories illustrate how the conferences punctuated many years of labour in these communities and extended

a conversation with the Universal House of Justice to as many friends as possible.

In Uashat mak Mani-utenam, an Innu community adjacent to the city of Sept-Îles, Que., the friends reflected on the conference in the context of 20 years of endeavour alongside Indigenous peoples. In the Atlantic provinces, the momentum from the conferences was swiftly channeled into a Book 1 seminar with youth, which nurtured “the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker.”³ In Brampton, Ont., part of the conference took the form of a “mela,” a common tradition in the neighbourhood among South Asians, which roughly translates to community festival.

And in Grand Forks, a small cluster in British Columbia with a handful of Bahá’ís, all of whom are seniors, seeming limitations were overcome as the friends drew on decades-long relationships with the Doukhobor and Indigenous populations to host a conference with over 70 participants.

An article about the two-stage election process recently initiated in Ottawa and Toronto, previously published online, also appears in this issue with the addition of further thoughts. It includes contributions from the Local Spiritual Assemblies of these localities, and details how the first elections took place in this manner.

Also in this issue is an article about a nationwide process initiated by the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada. This institution has guided the creation of a ‘Wills’ workshop, to facilitate understanding of the spiritual significance of writing a will, and how to make provisions for the final payment of the Right of God in one’s will.

In centres of intense activity with an established pattern around expansion and consolidation, social action initiatives have been taking shape. In the article, “Providing education: the signature contribution,” examples of how barriers to education are addressed in Burnaby, B.C., Hamilton, Ont. and Toronto, Ont. illustrate glimpses of the society-building power of the Faith.

As the House of Justice wrote, “This inherent power possessed by the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is visible even in the fledgling efforts of a Bahá’í community learning to serve humanity and promote the Word of God.”⁴

1 For coverage of the 72nd National Convention, visit the Bahá’í Canada website www.bahaicanada@bahai.ca

2 This was stated in a message dated 7 July 2022 from the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá’ís of Canada.

3 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, Riqván 2008.

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



Marion Jack was formally trained as a painter and, earlier in her life, travelled widely in Europe to paint.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community

In March 1931, when she was 65 years old, Marion made a second visit to Haifa¹ at the invitation of Shoghi Effendi. During her visit, Shoghi Effendi asked her to travel to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. She went directly there from Haifa. She was expecting to stay there only a few months but remained in Sofia until her death 23 years later.

¹ The first visit was in 1908 at the invitation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who gave her the nickname 'General Jack.'

Marion Jack: Immortal heroine

The following excerpts were adapted from a booklet titled *Marion Jack: Immortal Heroine* published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada in 1985.

"Young or old could never find a more inspiring pioneer in whose footsteps to walk than this wonderful soul...He [the Guardian] thinks that every Bahá'í and most particularly those who have left their homes and gone to serve in foreign fields, should know of, and turn their gaze to Marion Jack."

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the European Teaching Committee in May 1954, published in *Bahá'í News*, August 1954.

In 1893 'Abdu'l-Bahá had revealed this significant verse:

O ye close and dear friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

In the Orient scatter perfumes
And shed light upon the West,

Carry light unto the Bulgar
And the Slav with life invest.

Bulgaria and the entire Balkan area was in an extremely unsettled and turbulent condition in the 1920s and 1930s. There were several coups d'état and political violence was commonplace throughout the country. Bulgaria was economically weak and its problems were aggravated by the worldwide depression. Unemployment rose sharply, production fell, food prices soared and the peasants became desperately impoverished. The economic situation improved slowly during the 1930s but the political outlook grew bleak after 1934 as the government began to acquire the trappings of a fascist dictatorship. The condition of the region is described in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to Marion Jack in November 1931:

The Balkan states are in an awful condition. It has been for the last century a centre of constant strife and hatred, and wars that have sprung up there have invariably brought misery to others also. It is therefore very essential that the message of peace be brought to those lands ...

Marion Jack arrived in Sofia with a couple of suitcases for baggage, an enlarged heart and a number of other physical ailments. She took a room in a hotel and began to make friends and to teach the Faith.

In attempting to assess something of her achievement, it is instructive to think of the limitations and handicaps which she faced: aside from the continual handicaps of physical weakness and a limited budget, Marion Jack was quite unable to speak Bulgarian. She never learned the language as she never thought that she would be staying long enough in the country to make good use of it. She did learn French while living there and started both Esperanto and German as these were the languages of her friends and she felt that they were easier for her to learn than Bulgarian.

She never had an apartment or a home of her own in Sofia nor did she have any personal transport. All the meetings prior to the Second World War were held in her hotel room. This is how Gustav Lowe, a Bahá'í who often visited Marion, described the room and the teaching that went on there:

A museum full of her pictures, books and papers all over. We sat wherever there was some place—on 'the' chair, the bed, on the floor, and she always had some refreshments for her guests. The discussions of the Faith were handicapped by the complicated language question. Marion had nothing in the Bulgarian language, few people understood English and her favoured book, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Paris Talks*, had to be translated by one person from French into German or English, and by someone else into Bulgarian ...

The first Bulgarian edition of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, translated by Konstantin Dinkloff with the assistance of Martha Root, was published in 1932 and the *Hidden Words* was not translated and published until 1937. There

were also one or two small pamphlets in Bulgarian and that was all.

The majority of the Bulgarian people belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church which has given the country a long and rich tradition of Christianity. The Greek Orthodox Church was the only religion recognised by the state, every government employee was obliged to be a member of that church, and there were very many churches and monasteries.

In November 1931, when Marion Jack had been in Sofia for about eight months, the Guardian wrote to her:

Your splendid services, rendered with such faith, such humility, such perseverance and devotion, have at last been crowned with success. You have achieved a task that will ever live in, nay adorn and enrich, the annals of God's immortal Faith. What is now necessary is to consolidate the work already achieved ...

And in a letter written to her on his behalf at the same period, he wrote:

Look not to your own ability to present the Message, look to the promise of Bahá'u'lláh that He would help every soul who would rise to His service. (November 10, 1931)

In July 1932 he wrote:

Our Beloved, who watches over your devoted labours from on high is highly pleased with your perseverance, your efficiency, your high endeavours. Persevere and never, never feel disheartened.

The following quotation is taken from a letter written on his behalf in the same month:

You should not, however, measure the value of your teaching services by the number of those who actually embrace the Cause. For conversion is not an easy process. It often takes a long, a very long time. What is essential for you is to present the Message in a comprehensive and adequate manner and let time do the rest.

In March 1933 the authorities placed certain restrictions on the teaching activities of the Bahá'ís. In a post card sent to Emogene Hoagg in October 1933, Marion Jack wrote:

... things have been topsy turvey here for months. No big meetings since March, only the friends, but we kept up and still keep all feasts. The Holy Synod is against us. We are against them in consequence. If we were a more robust group with the blood of the martyrs in our veins OK but we are only kids and not a sign of a drop of that holy article ...

In July 1934 the first local Spiritual Assembly of Sofia was elected from a community of over 30 believers. The same month Shoghi Effendi wrote to Marion Jack:

Your great and historic work is by no means ended. Greater triumphs still await you ... In whatever field



The Bahá'ís of Sofia, Bulgaria, in the 1930s, with Marion Jack seated front centre.

Photo: Bahá'í World Vol. 5 p. 464

you feel you can best exercise the spiritual powers with which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has endowed you your work is most welcome to me.

In 1937, Marion visited Germany at the suggestion of the Guardian. The Faith was officially banned in Nazi Germany, its institutions had been disbanded and its files, records and libraries seized but Marion made a successful and enjoyable visit to the friends. As the shadows of approaching war darkened Europe, Marion stayed at her post.

As the decade of the 1930s drew to a close, Bulgaria became the centre of the European spy system. As the outbreak of open conflict in Europe became inevitable, the Guardian advised Marion to return to Canada. She suggested Switzerland and the Guardian agreed. But she soon realized that for a number of reasons it would not be possible for any Bahá'í to replace her.

By this time Marion was 73 years old. There were approximately 150 Bahá'ís and close friends of the Faith in Sofia. Meetings were held three times a week and Feasts were held regularly.

During the Second World War correspondence with Bulgaria was very limited. In March 1941, Nazi troops secretly entered the country in an attempt to forestall Soviet influence there and in order to compel Greece and Yugoslavia to repudiate their ties with Great Britain and align themselves with the Nazi cause. Bulgaria signed an agreement with Nazi Germany in the same month and thus entered the conflict on the side of the Axis powers. She declared war on Britain and the United States in December 1941. Marion Jack had a British passport and was in constant danger of internment from that time on until the end of the war. On January 10, 1944 the Allied forces carried out a devastating bombing attack on Sofia. The house in which Marion lodged was destroyed as was the house where all the Bulgarian editions of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* were stored. She was evacuated from the city shortly after this at the age of 77. This is how she later described the incident:

... In spite of the holocaust and its discomforts life has not been without its interests and amusements in this poor little unfortunate country. For instance when Miss H. and I wanted to evacuate on January 16th, after the first really bad blow-up, we thought we would have to board an open cattle car. A youth standing near the steps said 'you can't come in here if you are English or American!' We laughed and said 'OK we'll get into the next'... it was zero weather ... the man who was looking after our baggage ... found us a second class passenger car.

While they were being evacuated all Marion's luggage was stolen. She commented "It seems wonderful what one can do without." On September 9, 1944 Soviet troops entered Bulgaria and Bulgaria switched to the Soviet side in the war. By the end of 1947 a communist regime was firmly established in the country. About 3,000 people were tried and executed by the new regime in the years immediately after the war. A Stalinist-style political, economic and social reorganization permeated the country for the next decade. Active military operations in the Balkan area only came to an end in 1949. As soon as she was allowed, Marion returned to Sofia to rebuild the Bahá'í community and to continue the teaching work. She suffered from cold, inadequate food and housing and continual health problems but she persevered cheerfully. It was not possible to hold any meetings under the new government restrictions. The community had shrunk considerably. A few Bahá'ís had been killed in the bombing and many had emigrated. Undeterred, Marion adapted to every change with cheerful good spirits.

Her room was little more than a cubby-hole and one end of it was stacked up to the high windowsill with wood for the stove. She had to spend one-third of her income on heating. Parcels sent to her often failed to arrive. She wrote to her niece in 1947:

... Your dear mother's coat sent in October is not yet seen or heard of. My old rabbit skin has sadly lost its feathers and really looks forlorn in big spots, nevertheless it keeps one warm and that is the chief thing. I could not get it restored in summer for lack of funds, and my cloth coat is that of a real hobo—mended until it fairly groans in self-defense. The two pockets are sending up their dying gasps. As I usually carry two bags, I hustle and cover the worst spots on the pelt if anyone is coming who seems to matter ...

In 1948 Shoghi Effendi wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States through his secretary:

He [Shoghi Effendi] feels that the spirit of Marion Jack, her evident desire to stay with the community she loves so dearly and has fostered through thick and thin, reflects glory not only on the North American community but on the entire Faith. She should be left free to remain in Bulgaria, and your Assembly should see to it that she receives a sufficient income to end her life in peace and with no more hardships to be endured.

“Thank God I am able to help some people spiritually—and of late a few dear youths. This is my compensation, and if I can only help people to renew their faith in God I shall be more than grateful.”

She is a heroic soul, the finest example of the pioneer spirit which we have anywhere in the world, and the Guardian feels deeply indebted to her, and loves her very dearly.

The poverty in which she lived was often due to the fact that the money sent would not reach her or would come late. Sometimes it was sent as a type of cheque that was extremely difficult to cash. The exchange rate fluctuated and often caused her to lose funds intended for her support.

In 1947 she wrote to her niece:

... I had a letter this week from Haifa, and as I am told to persevere and keep on working I can turn a deaf ear to certain friends, who think I should go back where I came from just because I have turned 80; I tell them that I never suffer in anticipation of what may come. It is the most foolish of all worries ...

Despite her confident outlook, she did often long to see more of her family and wrote to her niece in 1947:

What I am missing at home! The babyhood of your darlings—the pleasure of knowing dear Bill, Lucy, Sybil and kind Mrs. Logie and Co.! Thank God I am able to help some people spiritually—and of late a few dear youths. This is my compensation, and if I can only help people to renew their faith in God I shall be more than grateful. Indifference to our Creator is the world's great crime ...

During the last months of her life she was bedridden and suffered greatly but her worry centered around the problems that she was causing others and her letters were full of praise for those who helped her. A friend from the British Legation who visited her in her last illness wrote:

... I feel she is better in herself, but that at 87, she will not have the strength to get up again. She does not say very much at least when I go to see her—just smiles and likes to hold my hand ... She does sleep a lot and when awake seems to be already in another world ...

Marion Jack passed away on March 27, 1954. Her body was buried in the British Military Cemetery in Sofia. Two days later Shoghi Effendi sent this cable:

MOURN LOSS IMMORTAL HEROINE
MARION JACK GREATLY LOVED AND
DEEPLY ADMIRER BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ
SHINING EXAMPLE PIONEERS PRESENT
FUTURE GENERATIONS EAST AND WEST
SURPASSED CONSTANCY DEDICATION
SELF-ABNEGATION FEARLESSNESS BY NONE
EXCEPT INCOMPARABLE MARTHA ROOT.
HER UNREMITTING HIGHLY MERITORIOUS
ACTIVITIES COURSE ALMOST HALF
CENTURY BOTH NORTH AMERICA
SOUTHEAST EUROPE, ATTAINING CLIMAX
DARKEST MOST DANGEROUS PHASE
SECOND WORLD WAR SHED IMPERISHABLE
LUSTRE CONTEMPORARY BAHÁ'Í HISTORY.
TRIUMPHANT SOUL NOW GATHERED
DISTINGUISHED BAND CO-WORKERS ABHÁ
KINGDOM MARTHA ROOT, LUA GETSINGER,
MAY MAXWELL, HYDE DUNN, SUSAN
MOODY, KEITH RANSOM-KEHLER, ELLA
BAILEY, DOROTHY BAKER WHOSE REMAINS
LYING IN SUCH WIDELYSCATTERED AREAS
GLOBE AS HONOLULU, CAIRO, BUENOS
AIRES, SYDNEY, TEHERAN, ISFAHAN,
TRIPOLI, DEPTH MEDITERRANEAN
ATTEST MAGNIFICENCE PIONEER SERVICES
RENDERED NORTH AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í
COMMUNITY APOSTOLIC FORMATIVE AGES
BAHÁ'Í DISPENSATION.

ADVISE ARRANGE ASSOCIATION CANADIAN
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EUROPEAN
TEACHING COMMITTEE BEFITTING
MEMORIAL GATHERING MASHRIQU'L
ADHKÁR. MOVED SHARE WITH
UNITED STATES CANADIAN NATIONAL
ASSEMBLIES EXPENSES ERECTION SOON
AS CIRCUMSTANCES PERMIT WORTHY
MONUMENT HER GRAVE DESTINED
CONFER ETERNAL BENEDICTION
COUNTRY ALREADY HONORED ITS CLOSE
PROXIMITY SACRED CITY ASSOCIATED
PROCLAMATION FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

—SHOGHI

The spirit of her beautiful life and her radiant faith shine through the following few words she wrote in a letter to her niece in May 1951:

... The Messengers of God are one—the Word and all religions are one in essence—only that truth is given in a great volume so to speak as man's capacity to understand it increases through the ages. It is progressive and continuous, and there can be nothing greater than world unity, and the world as a family in this age. But forgive me my dear I did not intend writing this at all. It just simply seems to burst from me in my longing for world peace ...



Several friends from the team serving in Uashat mak Mani-utenam, Que. Photo: Gaétan Giroux

Relationships of trust built over time evident at Uashat mak Mani-utenam, Que. global conference

In a small locality of 3,000 people, the conference was an occasion to reflect on the distance traversed over more than 20 years of community building.

The Bahá'í Faith was established in Uashat mak Mani-utenam in 1996 when Carl Cleary, an Innu Bahá'í from nearby Sept-Îles, Que. spoke to his friend and co-worker Rolland Tshernish at their workplace about the Faith, the equality of men and women, and the unity of mankind. Mr. Tshernish readily accepted the message, telling Mr. Cleary that his father had had

a vision of these teachings being realized and had taught them to him. After that, Mr. Tshernish and Mr. Cleary planned to teach the Faith to Indigenous peoples. They asked the Teaching Committee of Quebec for the funds to bring Kevin Locke, a well-known Lakota Bahá'í and artist to Uashat mak Mani-utenam and Sept-Îles, but at that time, it was very expensive, and the funds were

not available. They prayed to be able to realize their plan, but the “answer to the prayers was something different,” said Mr. Cleary.

At the time, Mr. Cleary was feeling very discouraged that they were unable bring Mr. Locke to Uashat mak Mani-utenam, and he spoke to a Bahá'í friend about it, Julie Goudreau from Pointe-à-la-Croix,

Que. She told him that she had a teepee with a nine-pointed star on it and offered to come if they were unable to bring Mr. Locke. In the end, Ms. Goudreau came with her husband, Rodrigue Guitard, and some members of Mr. Tshernish's family accepted the Faith at a gathering in the teepee on July 9, a Holy Day commemorating the Martyrdom of the Báb. After that, many others became Bahá'ís. This led to somewhat of a "crisis" in a tight-knit community where the Faith was not yet well-known, said Mr. Cleary.

"...At the beginning, there was a bit of distrust and prejudice [between the Uashat mak Mani-utenam community and members of the Bahá'í community], but this all changed, this all turned," explained Mr. Cleary. Today he says that he feels that there is trust between these two communities. "That's not nothing...for me, it's a big evolution to see that."

Since then, there have been a variety of initiatives that have supported Uashat mak Mani-utenam and the Innu Nation, stretching from Saguenay to Lac Saint-Jean all the way up to the very isolated communities along the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River. There have been Indigenous gatherings called by the Bahá'í Council, and children's classes, junior youth groups and institute courses. One important space since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a Wednesday evening gathering on Zoom, which allows for spiritual sharing, healing, and learning about Indigenous cultures and traditional teachings. One critical element in supporting the development of community life has been that the Bahá'í Council of Quebec, and before the Council was established, the Teaching Committee of Quebec "never left Uashat alone," says Dana Heron, a member of the Uashat mak Mani-utenam team. "Regularly a travel teacher would be going [to Uashat mak Mani-utenam], other Assemblies helped a lot. There was always constant encouragement,



Some of the first Bahá'ís in Uashat mak Mani-utenam, Que. declared at a gathering in this teepee.

constant nurturing. There was... cooperation and reciprocity going on all the time," she says. Over the years there have been several dedicated souls who have travelled many hours to visit the community regularly. For a time, there was an Indigenous committee assisting with the gatherings in Uashat mak Mani-utenam, but after the pandemic hit, the committee became a nucleus, consulting with and serving members and families of Innu communities, which is "inclusive, not exclusive," according to Dr. Sharon Hatcher, a member of the nucleus.

The nucleus includes friends from a variety of backgrounds, including Innu, other First Nations, and the white francophone Quebecois population. The Innu population has been heavily involved in the community-building process from its inception and several Innu Bahá'ís continue to be involved today, helping to organize the global conference. The Universal House of Justice wrote: "In its early stages, the systematic effort to reach out to a population and foster its participation in the process of capacity building accelerates markedly when members of that population are themselves in the vanguard of such an effort. These

individuals will have special insight into those forces and structures in their societies that can, in various ways, reinforce the endeavours under way."¹

Over the years, it has brought the team joy to see an evolution in the capacities of Indigenous Bahá'ís, as they have organized many gatherings and events. "All of us develop our capacities by getting involved as a team. In terms of learning, you can't go into an Indigenous community from the outside, without having that bond, working relationships with [Indigenous peoples]," says Dr. Hatcher. She notes that two of the Innu Bahá'ís have a certain prominence, one as a social worker (Mr. Cleary), some of whose friends and colleagues attended the conference, and one who organized a major Innu festival in August for children, youth and families, Normand Junior Tshernish-Pilot.² Mr. Tshernish-Pilot told Dr. Hatcher that if he hadn't been organizing Bahá'í conferences for several years, he is not sure that he would be able to make the contributions he is making to his community now. The capacities developed in advancing the Plan help in all facets of life. In addition, Louise Profeit-Leblanc of the Northern Tutchone First Nations, consults extensively with the friends serving in Uashat mak Mani-utenam. She was present at the conference and contributed storytelling and art activities for young and old.

The team has met Innu people with many different points of view and approaches to spirituality, including Catholics who sing hymns in their Wednesday gatherings. They have learned that the Innu community is very tight-knit, and most members know each other and like to have the opportunity to gather and uplift each other spiritually. There is a great deal of concern in the Innu community for the younger generations, many of whom have rejected all forms of

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

2 The name of the festival is Innu Nikamu.

belief. One group that the team has conversed and worked with a great deal is known as traditionalists, who are trying to reconnect with their ancestral spiritual teachings, including prophecies about the coming gathering of all peoples as one human family under the one Creator. Mr. Cleary, who says his understanding of the traditionalists has evolved over the past three years, describes the approach of the Bahá'ís with this group as being one of sharing knowledge and vision, akin to the idea of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that "we must be lovers of light no matter from what lamp it appears, that we must be lovers of the rose no matter in what garden it blooms, and that we must be seekers of truth, no matter from what source it comes."³

The conference took place on a Saturday and Sunday in mid-June, one day at the Shaputuan Museum, which recounts the history of the Innu people, and the next day at Shipit, a chalet and conference centre. Eighty-two people attended the conference, with families of all ages coming in and out, including many children and youth. "At any moment, there were only 25 people sitting down, as part of the culture, the families come and go, they come for supper, they come to discuss; it's important to have the freedom and flexibility to come and go, and that very open, family approach," said Dr. Hatcher.

The team has also learned over the years that it's important to get to know the community well and to accept people where they are at, being non-judgmental, says Dr. Hatcher, summarizing the views of other members of the team. She acknowledges that Indigenous peoples in Canada have every reason to be distrustful of religion and marvels at the relationships that have been patiently built over the years in Uashat mak Mani-utenam. Gaétan Giroux who has been visiting Uashat mak Mani-utenam for 20 years, says that community members have been traumatized by religious people

and that many Elders have spoken about the abuse that they received in residential schools, with trauma having an impact on their children and grandchildren.

While there are many possible reasons why trust has developed between the Bahá'í community and the Innu Nation, despite a general distrust of religion, it is not always straightforward. "I've asked myself, and many people have asked me, what is happening here," says Dr. Hatcher. "As Louise Profeit-Leblanc says, every Indigenous Nation is different and there are many reasons why there has been receptivity in the Innu Nation." She describes it as "a very well-organized Nation, very focused on preserving its spiritual and cultural heritage...but there's also very strong spiritual beliefs that are one with the Faith, their traditional beliefs have not been corrupted over time by institutions." She notes that the community has a great need for assistance because of trauma and many associated social problems, but that it is an empowered community that also asks for help when it needs it. Dr. Hatcher says that she thinks that many Indigenous friends see that the Faith has tools that can help in the construction and development of their communities. In addition, the Bahá'í gatherings provide environments in which people from all backgrounds can mix. "Many Indigenous friends attend events where there are only Indigenous people[s], whereas in the Bahá'í activities, there are people of all nations, a lot of friends have given that comment," she says.

Dr. Hatcher describes the team's work as learning "in all humility" how to adapt the institute process to the Innu population. She recalls that at the National Convention this year there was a discussion about how the institute materials can be adapted to Indigenous cultures. She remembers that the Counsellors mentioned that the way forward is the institute framework and processes and that if they do not seem to be working, it's not the institute process that is the problem, it's that the Bahá'ís

haven't figured out how to adapt the materials and methods to a specific population.

She said that she hopes that the feedback that the team has received from the Elders and the unconditional love they've received from community members is indicative that the team really has a different approach. "We're not trying to proselytize, we're really trying to see how we can be of service...the message of the unity of all nations coming together and the need for the First Nations to be at the table is what their teachings tell them," Dr. Hatcher explains. One part of adapting to the process has been adapting the language to suit the needs of the Innu friends. "Adapting the language is really, really important. They use Creator, so we use Creator. In some of the materials we talk about the Faith, but not about religion. We adapt the language because some of it is traumatizing."

Some examples of breakthroughs in understanding that came after years of building relationships were evident at the conference. One Elder in the community, who had known about the Faith for many years, was especially touched by the beginning of the film *Exemplar*, which was commissioned by the Universal House of Justice. "She is, I suppose, in her late 80s, and she got so excited that she jumped up from her chair. She is a very articulate lady, but at that minute she couldn't even get a word out of her mouth," recounts Ms. Heron. "She was pointing at Mr. Loft in *Exemplar*, at the beginning there, she was so excited."

The film shows a young boy, Jim Loft of the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory in the Bay of Quinte, Ont. watching the train pass from Montreal, Que. to Buffalo, N.Y., as he sits atop a fence. He is so surprised to see a Figure in long robes with a long beard ('Abdu'l-Bahá) that he falls off the fence! After this short but profound encounter, Mr. Loft later became the second Indigenous Bahá'í in Canada, his wife Melba Loft being

3 Ruhi Book 2: *Arising to Serve*.

the first. The two pioneered to the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and suffered material deprivations to advance the Cause. In the film, Mr. Loft's grandson Bob Watts recounts the story of his grandfather's encounter with 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his own grandchildren around a fire.

Another Elder from Uashat mak Mani-utenam had what Ms. Heron describes as "an epiphany" after hearing a Bahá'í speak in the Innu language about the institute process, and the vibrant communities that Bahá'ís and their friends are contributing to all over the world. She said that she had been looking for many years for a community that corresponded to her hopes for the future generations, had been through many spaces, but had finally just found that community where she felt at home.

"It's a slow process...[but] suddenly Bahá'u'lláh removed the veils, and they could see with their own eyes what the Faith is about," said Ms. Heron about the impact of the conference on these two Elders. Both Elders are well-connected in the community and one of them is the mother of a prominent Innu leader, who was appointed to the Canadian senate in 2021, Michèle Audette.

Mr. Cleary says that the attitude of the Bahá'ís at the conference, some of whom came from across the province, helped touch the hearts of the Elders. "They really listened to the Innu culture and were very careful. They made us believe more," he said.

Another highlight of the conference was a visit from the National Spiritual Assembly via Zoom, which Dr. Hatcher describes as historic. Each member of the National Spiritual Assembly addressed the conference and one of the Elders was introduced to the National Spiritual Assembly as well. The presence of the National Assembly was "tremendous," said Ms. Heron. "It gave them [the participants] a kind of hope, this is what's possible."

Some other highlights of the



An Indigenous youth danced for the conference in full regalia.

conference were the arts; music and song by an Indigenous youth, and an Indigenous junior youth attended the conference from a Facebook invite and danced for the conference in full regalia.

The follow-up is always a challenge, with a family camp held in the Lac Saint-Jean region taking place after the conference. The nucleus plans to meet soon to build on the wonderful strengths and relationships in the community. The team is aware that there is a great deal of untapped potential and receptivity. Some of the friends who would have attended the conference could not come as there was another event held at the same time in the region.

As so often happens, the spiritual atmosphere of the conference attracted others who had not previously planned to attend. A Québécois youth and her boyfriend

staying at the youth hostel nearby were invited to attend the conference and they enjoyed it. "Her and her boyfriend said that it's the first time they've been in a gathering where everyone's included: children, junior youth, babies on the floor, all ages," said Mr. Giroux. He also says that visiting Uashat mak Mani-utenam over the years has been very healing for him as someone who has experienced trauma, and that it is impossible to convey the beauty of the Innu community through words. He thinks it is very important to realize that the conference is part of a process of more than 20 years of relationship-building. "It is not just one event. It's 20 years or more of history coming up to that event," he says.



The Indigenous All-Nations Drum Circle performed during the conference wearing traditional skirts. Photo: Barry Verigin

Conference in Grand Forks, B.C. planned with Doukhobor population focuses on peace

A small group of Bahá'ís collaborated with organizations in the wider community to host a conference that brought participants together to consult on concepts of shared importance such as peace and social justice and introduced them to the institution of the Universal House of Justice.

For our small group of Bahá'ís in one of the less populated clusters in British Columbia, to hold a conference on the scale called for by the Universal House of Justice seemed indeed a formidable task. However, calling on powers beyond our own, and drawing on the decades of relationship-building among the Doukhobor and Indigenous populations, the veritable friendships with the wider community, and the power of the arts, a unified vision of peace and hope amazed the planners and the participants.

The conference took place on April 30 and focused on fostering a culture of peace and contributing

to social justice. Forty-seven people participated in the morning session for the large group presentations and small group discussions; this number increased to 71 for the afternoon's "The Art of Peace" program.

The conference took place at the Doukhobor USCC (Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ) Community Hall. We originally rented the downstairs space, but an individual from the Doukhobor community donated the fee for the beautiful upper hall with its banks of large windows, saying that because the conference was about peace it had to take place "in the light." This hall is not usually rented out.

Posters with quotes on peace were put up on the walls and a large poster with the quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "My home is a home of peace..." was placed at the entrance. The USCC asked to keep it there after the conference ended. The downstairs hall was beautifully set up for the traditional Doukhobor borscht and bread luncheon. Tea and coffee were included in the cost of the lunch and sweets were donated. The Grand Forks Rotary Club paid \$500 towards the cost of the lunch and the Bahá'í community paid \$400.

There are only a handful of Bahá'ís in the entire Boundary cluster; all live within Grand Forks and the

surrounding rural area. All are seniors between the ages of 70 to 78. We undertook the planning of the conference and invited the local Rotary Club, Indigenous groups, and the Doukhobor community to collaborate. Meetings with the small group facilitators were arranged beforehand to go over the material and code of conduct. Their copy of the latter included a list of capacities that they could encourage the group to draw on to support a humble posture of learning.

We had two goals: build on the relationships we already have with the Doukhobor and Indigenous communities and the local Rotary Club (now designated as a Peacebuilder Club); and introduce the Universal House of Justice to the wider community. We arranged for an interview on the local radio station announcing the conference; the local newspaper printed an extensive article introducing details of the conference and that it is one of a series taking place around the world; posters were placed in town in strategic places, and many personal invitations were given to friends and contacts. In addition, the USCC administrative office sent out notices to an extensive email list, as did the Rotary Club. Four locations in town also had registration forms for pick-up and drop-off. We also invited the local library, which collaborates with us on a monthly “Peace Cafe,” to take part. They sent an employee with an amazing book display for adults and children on the topic of peace; she also took part in the conference.

The program began with an Indigenous land acknowledgement and prayer. The conference was gifted eagle feathers wrapped with leather to use as “talking feathers” in the group discussions, honouring an Indigenous process that allows for every voice to be heard.

There were three presenters to the large group: Murray Knox for Grand Forks Rotary Club, John J. Verigin Jr. for the Doukhobor community and Shelley Grandy representing the



The Grand Forks Choral Society performed during the conference.

Photo: Barry Verigin

Bahá’í Faith. This latter presentation introduced the Universal House of Justice as having initiated these global conferences and reviewed the purpose of the gathering. Slides were shown of conferences that had already taken place around the world.

Five small groups formed in circles in the large hall. We had assigned groups beforehand and prepared folders in five different colours, so they were easily distributed as people came in and registered. Each group had a facilitator which included two from the Doukhobor community and one from the Indigenous community. Every group had at least one Bahá’í and one person assigned to record the salient points.

The first session spoke to fostering a culture of peace. Participants were asked about the values that exist in a culture of peace and how we behave towards one another as individuals and as a community. The second session addressed the attributes of social justice and questions were asked about how social justice looks, sounds, and feels. Each session asked that participants write down what they felt they could contribute to creating a peaceful and socially just community. There was time at the end of each session for a report by all groups. Conversations were rich and continued between and after sessions.

Afterwards, the Doukhobor national magazine, *Iskra*, published a three-

page article, including many pictures, of the conference. In the article, one participant remarked that he appreciated the ‘facilitator’ format and the fact that the focus was on the very idea of peace and justice as opposed to concrete issues or examples. This made it “a very safe place to discuss universal ideas around peace and justice.”

Additionally, three women of Doukhobor background, two of whom facilitated at the conference, formed a discussion circle with a member of our Bahá’í group who was raised in a Doukhobor family. They have met many times already and she reports that there are always questions about the Faith in their elevated conversations.

Another conference participant is now reading the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*. The mural, “Let Your Vision Be World Embracing” in a prominent place downtown,¹ continues to draw attention. Lastly, our Auxiliary Board member brought a Bahá’í guest from another cluster to the conference who has since moved to Grand Forks after procuring a job teaching at the high school, increasing the size of our group!

– Shelley Grandy

1 The cover of this issue features a photograph of this mural.



Children at the 'mela' create rangoli, a traditional Indian art form. Photo: Jasmine Myers

Springdale neighbourhood global conference: “It has brought me hope”

A neighbourhood team reports on the 'mela' and conference that took place
May 28-29 and June 4, respectively.

Three months prior to the conference, the neighbourhood team started to think systematically about how to engage more families in the community-building process. Home visits during an institute campaign in March focused on conversations with the families of the youth, and two community gatherings were held in March and April, which engaged some 50 individuals in each.

In keeping with South Asian tradition and to help convey the importance of the event, a formal invitation was created along with a deepening

theme around the first theme of the conference, Bahá'u'lláh's Vision for Humanity. Friends visited families in their homes to study the theme and present them with the invitation. A total of 95 households were visited over a three-week period. The team has always been conscious of nurturing the capacity among youth to invite their friends; however, during this time, they were particularly conscious in nurturing this capacity amongst entire families. As soon as there was an understanding of this first theme, the question of how the conversation could be

extended to include others was explored. Many families had conversations with others, which assisted three new families to be involved in the core activities even prior to the conferences. One family decided to host an event in their local park for a community gathering to allow for easier accessibility for their friends and neighbours, and then invited them to the conferences from this event. Through families engaging their networks, 34 adults registered for the conference, with 17 of them attending.

To allow the widest cross section of friends to participate, the conference was spread over two weekends. During the first weekend, tents went up to host a ‘mela,’ a common tradition in the neighbourhood among South Asians which translates to community festival. It was held in the neighbourhood park where the first activity began 10 years ago. The purpose of the mela was to extend the first theme of Bahá’u’lláh’s Vision for Humanity to the population—including veteran families as well as newly-acquainted friends—introduce families to the core activities offered, and continue to register friends for the conference the following weekend.

Knowing that the community had a vision of what a mela has looked like historically, the team made an effort to consult with families on home visits about the types of activities that reflected the cultures present in the neighbourhood. One mother shared how, “Melas are not just for the children and young people. There should be activities that include the adults and grandparents because they are part of the community too. They should enjoy themselves too!” Rangoli, a traditional Indian art form, was included as one of the activities that parents engaged in to reflect on the vibrancy of the community. Similarly, music, food, song, art, fellowship, dance, even collective activities like musical chairs were included in the mela, all animated by the capacities raised from the training institute. Teams of youth carried out elevated conversation around this first theme in the park, while programs and activities for children and junior youth were being offered. Each day concluded with presentations prepared by children, junior youth, youth and a few brave adults to share the unfolding of the community-building process over the past 10 years. Families in attendance went home with a pamphlet created in both English and Punjabi which highlighted the neighbourhood activities, as well as a calendar of the activities planned for the summer.

“Seeing all these families coming together and talking to one another and seeing our kids being taken care of by young people made me so happy. It has brought me hope.”

At the mela, families reflected on how the work of building a better world will require the contributions of everyone. A mother who was reflecting with her daughter shared, “When my daughter talks about what she is doing for the community, I always think it is good. But I didn’t really think I could do things like that. When we kept talking more today about how helping the community needs many people working together, using their talents and doing what they can, I saw a bit more how I can do it. One of the youth showed me how my cooking, or making cha for the people in the camp is the way I am also contributing. And I love cooking! It’s more about how we all work together in whatever way we can.”

The joyful conversations were illuminated by reflecting on Bahá’u’lláh’s words, “Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch, the flowers of one garden.” To help the community recognize the beauty and vibrancy of everyone’s contributions, the parents came together and created diverse flowers with the rangoli. As the flowers were being made, conversations around the progress of children and efforts to support youth filled the air. A mother who had been standing on the sidelines watching was so attracted by the art being created that she slowly made her way over to the table and contributed to the collective pieces as well.

A conference was held the following Saturday to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the conference themes of Building a Vibrant Community and the Centrality of Education. The plenary sessions included presentations from core activity participants on topics related to the themes, which served to frame the small group discussions and activities that followed. During one ple-

nary session, while a group of youth were presenting, a child turned to her children’s class teacher and said, “I know what I want to be when I grow up. I want to be a community leader just like them.” Another mother shared, “My family and I have lived in this neighbourhood for not too long and we have been hoping to connect to others for some time. Seeing all these families coming together and talking to one another and seeing our kids being taken care of by young people made me so happy. It has brought me hope.”

There were three adult groups of about 15 to 20 people each, two of which spoke English and one of which spoke Punjabi, and one small group of about five seniors. When reflecting on how the conversation advanced, one facilitator noted how her group gave a lot of attention to reflecting on the twofold moral purpose and the aspirations of their children. “We thought about the example of pursuing a higher education. I saw how the parents were beginning to articulate how education was not just something for their child’s individual progress, but also contributes to advancing society.” With each conversation, the facilitators saw how families advanced in their understanding of how we could contribute to building a materially and spiritually prosperous community.

The conferences gave the team a glimpse of the following line from the 30 December 2021 message of the Universal House of Justice: “Within each centre of intense activity, collaborative arrangements emerge among groups of families, who organize community-building activities among themselves with a view to widening the embrace of such activities to many nearby households.”



Participants at the Book 1 seminar in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

In the Atlantic region, conferences and Book 1 seminar build capacity for service

A Book 1 seminar in Charlottetown, P.E.I., following several global conferences in the region, helped participants to broaden their understanding of the concept of service and see themselves as part of a community that consults and acts together.

In June, a global conference took place in the Dartmouth North neighbourhood in Halifax, N.S. Leading up to the conference, the neighbourhood team carried out a number of home visits with families, speaking with them about how Bahá'ís and those labouring alongside them are contributing to raising vibrant communities, drawing from the first theme of the conference ma-

terials—Bahá'u'lláh's Vision for Humanity. This allowed for meaningful conversations to develop over time, extending beyond an invitation.

The conference was a source of hope to community members. Previously, parents felt that their ability to counter negative societal forces in the lives of their children was limited to the home. Once they entered the space of the conference, how-

ever, they gained confidence in the promise of collective action. Seeing youth dedicate their entire day to sitting and consulting together about matters related to the betterment of their community changed how parents perceived the capacities and aspirations of their children. In the case of one parent, the single act of a youth volunteering to read a passage from the conference materials



Youth in a breakout session at the global conference held in the Dartmouth North neighbourhood in Halifax, N.S.

gave her hope for the future of the community.

The parents voiced concerns they had for their children and consulted about what steps they could take to better their community. One parent stressed the importance of praying for the children. Facilitators then asked parents if they would be open to starting a regular devotional gathering. All the parents agreed that this was a good idea. Consultations also allowed for families previously not connected to the community-building efforts in the neighbourhood to hear about the educational activities for the first time.

There was also an advance in understanding around the concept of service. The presence of all generations was a visual indicator of the many contributions that can be made to community life. This helped foster the understanding that service is not only carried out by individual animators and children's class teachers, but in many ways as the community arises as a protagonist in its own development. Through this, the concept of service is broadened, inviting universal participation.

Following the conference, word spread throughout the community regarding the educational activities and many of the parents from these new families became champions of the junior youth program and children's classes. Starting a junior youth group and expanding participation in the children's class in the neighbourhood became easier than ever before because even if families

had not participated in the conference themselves, their neighbours had told them about the activities.

Soon after the conference, the Atlantic region sent four tutors to Ontario for two weeks to participate in a tutor seminar hosted by the Institute Board of Ontario. Even though sending away four team members for two weeks was a sacrifice for the Atlantic neighbourhoods, the teams saw the benefits of having participated in the seminar almost immediately after returning home. This institute seminar focused on how Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* could help participants form a Bahá'í identity and commit to a life of service to humanity. The seminar was different in that it gave two weeks for this study and the related capacities to develop, rather than the norm at the time, which was around three days.

Upon returning home, the tutors adjusted their plans for the youth movement in their region. Before leaving for the tutor seminar, the region had planned an animator training in the form of a two-week intensive study of Ruhi Book 5: *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth*. After returning from the tutor seminar in Ontario, the team instead decided to host a two-week institute seminar for the study of Ruhi Book 1.

Bahia Burias was the coordinator for the youth summer of service program in the region and attended the tutor seminar in Ontario. Regarding the decision, she said that they set out to organize a Book 1

training with such quality that the youth would have confidence in the institute process and themselves to embark on a path of service, though they had not yet been trained to serve as animators or children's class teachers. This, again, broadened the concept of service as a lifelong endeavour.

Friends from the Dartmouth North neighbourhood in Halifax, N.S. joined those from Amherst, N.S. and Charlottetown, P.E.I., for the seminar, which took place in Charlottetown. Over two weeks, the participants completed the first two units of Book 1. Their days included study, followed by home visits where they conversed with neighbours about the concepts they were exploring. During the second week, they studied sections from Ruhi Books 3 and 5 so that they could begin to understand the language and concepts around children's classes and the junior youth program. This helped them to describe to families and their children the purpose and importance of the educational programs of the institute.

The tutors thought about how the space of the seminar could help participants develop habits that lend themselves to the betterment of the individual and society. These habits included the memorization of Bahá'í Writings and the bringing of oneself to account each day. Ms. Burias commented, "We're used to giving participants of Book 1 prayer books and *The Hidden Words* and hoping for the best, but during the seminar in Toronto, one of the questions tutors asked was: How do you ask participants frankly and directly 'Are you praying? Are you bringing yourself to account each day?'" The Atlantic tutors took these questions home and decided to learn about them.

In practice, the tutors nurtured a collective space in which these habits could be developed throughout the two weeks they were together. "We realized that we didn't want to prescribe what it looks like to take yourself into account or how much you

need to memorize,” explains Ms. Burias. Tutors would seek opportunities throughout the seminar to try to understand how each participant was increasing in their understanding of these spaces by having conversations with them.

Every day, after collective devotions in the mornings, 15 minutes was set aside for memorization. Each participant approached this time at their own pace. As the week progressed, this space became quieter, and the youth distracted each other less. If they were not using the space to memorize, they left it quiet and reverent for others. At the beginning, the participants would often select the shortest passages to memorize, but towards the end of the seminar, they would identify which one would be most helpful to hold in their minds. Tutors would sometimes ask participants in their study groups to share with each other what they were memorizing, but there was no sense of pressure to memorize, as long as they were respecting those quiet 15 minutes.

After the memorization period, participants were given another 15 minutes to bring themselves to account each day. This was also a quiet space to write in their notebooks and think about their day. During this time, tutors tried to help participants connect to the concepts they were studying and to answer any of their questions.

As the days passed, the devotional character of the seminar and the youths’ commitment to it also strengthened. “At the beginning, there were a lot of distractions, and tutors did not want to hush people,” Ms. Burias commented. “They asked participants to close their eyes and sit in silence. Some did and some did not. However, their attitude towards this space completely changed towards the end of the seminar. We’d finish devotions, and it would feel like things were ending because everybody was quiet, and then someone else would want to say a prayer, and we’d just keep on saying prayers and singing,” she continued.



Participants make their own prayer books during the Book 1 seminar held at the Bahá’í Centre in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Participants signed up in groups of two or three to prepare the devotional program for each day. The first group to do this picked a theme to focus the devotions on and the groups that followed did the same. The participants’ capacity to host a devotional space advanced over the course of the seminar, as did their attitude toward the space. At the beginning, the youth would clap after a song, or they would make comments such as, “That’s such a beautiful song.” As the days advanced, and even before reaching the second unit of Book 1 on the concept of prayer, it became clear that the devotional space was becoming more reverent. It also became clear that it was affecting the youth in a way the team had never witnessed before. “The environment of the devotions was so strong that you couldn’t interrupt it almost. It was just such a strong space,” says Ms. Burias.

This increasing ownership of learning also demonstrated itself outside the study space each day when the youth carried out home visits as a practical element of the seminar. The youth were reluctant at first, as spending an hour having a meaningful conversation with a person they hadn’t met yet was a new experience. Ms. Burias explains that through this, “Their capacity to have a single conversation grew exponentially.”

At the beginning, these conversations were like an interview. The

youth prepared questions and small paragraphs to help guide them. After a few visits, they became more comfortable going on visits and more familiar with the things they wanted to share. “Because the tutors had prepared so much, they were able to see the logic of the sections,” comments Ms. Burias, “They could also help participants build understanding.” Commenting on how the seminar helped youth to take ownership of the learning process, Ms. Burias says, “Giving the study more time allowed for the development of capacities...you can just see the power of the institute.”

When one volunteer looked at the seminar space from an outside point of view, she thought every participant was a Bahá’í. In reality, there were only a handful of declared Bahá’ís in the seminar. Ms. Burias thinks this is because participants saw themselves as contributing to the vision of Bahá’u’lláh, “The space is about capacity building, it’s not necessarily about who you think you are or how you identify...they saw themselves contributing to this vision...” Ms. Burias sees this as a testament to the way that the institute process welcomes all paces and strides—anyone is welcome to walk this path of service, and to contribute to what the Bahá’í world is learning. “Everyone saw themselves taking that path.”

“Wills” workshop promotes greater understanding of the Right of God

The following article, written by several Representatives of the Right of God guided by the Board of Trustees in Canada, describes how the “Wills” workshop, offered across Canada, has raised consciousness over the last two years.

Every law and principle of the Faith revolves around unity, and the guidelines around writing a will are no exception. One touching story illustrates this: before he passed away, a man had written a soul-stirring testament of his love, faith, and belief in Bahá’u’lláh, and wished for his children to do the same to maintain family unity. The testament had so touched their hearts that they framed and read it on each anniversary of his passing.

“Wills and the Right of God” is a workshop offered by Deputy Trustees and Representatives of the Right of God across Canada. Its purpose is to help the believers understand the spiritual significance of writing a will, and how to make provisions

for the final payment of the Right of God in one’s will. Guided by two letters from the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, members of the Institution in Canada worked together over several months to develop and refine the workshop material. The late Bahram Gustaspi lovingly shepherded its development from beginning to end.

Over the past two years, the “Wills and the Right of God” workshop has been offered across the country in all provinces and territories, with some 225 learning events held in English, French, and Persian, hosted in large conferences, small groups and with individuals. The workshop has been adapted to reflect the laws in each province and territory

and the materials also include sample wording, supplemental legal references, and handouts for one’s executor or legal counsel.

Participants learn that the writing of a will is a sacred, spiritual responsibility. “Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will,” Bahá’u’lláh revealed in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, “The testator should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme Protector, the



Friends from Prince Rupert and Terrace, B.C. study the “Wills” workshop online with Deputy Trustee Bahram Gustaspi (centre, left) in October 2021.

Underscoring further the spiritual nature of a Bahá'í will, Shoghi Effendi explains that "the execution of the provisions of the will causes the spirit of the deceased to rejoice in the Abha Kingdom..."

Faithful.¹ Underscoring further the spiritual nature of a Bahá'í will, Shoghi Effendi explains that "the execution of the provisions of the will causes the spirit of the deceased to rejoice in the Abha Kingdom..."²

The workshop includes the testament of Mr. Yadollah Vahdat, written in prison before his martyrdom in April 1981.³ Participants from Prince Rupert and Terrace, B.C. caught a glimpse of the person behind the testament by reading an additional description of his life story. Upon reading Mr. Vahdat's testament,⁴ one participant who had served at the Bahá'í National Centre in the 1980s was reminded of several martyrs' testaments being made available during the intensive media campaign launched by the National Spiritual Assembly at the time, to raise awareness of the persecutions in Iran.

1 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 109.

2 Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 24 August 1982, cited in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*.

3 See Archives of Bahá'í Persecution in Iran website: <https://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org/archive/yadollah-vahdat-executed-firing-squad-shiraz-30-april-1981>.

4 See Find a Grave Memorial website: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/159354377/yadullah-vahdat>.

During the workshops, it was not unusual to hear participants share thoughts similar to those offered by one Ottawa participant, who commented, "I have never made a testament, even though as a Bahá'í I've had a will for decades." In another workshop, participants who had not yet written a testament in their wills were encouraged to draft one and later share how it had affected them. One person said it felt like carrying out a significant spiritual obligation, another that it felt it was the first time he had ever really been listened to. Someone else noted that it made him appreciate being a Bahá'í and how everything good in his life was due to Bahá'u'lláh. Others simply shared that the exercise made them appreciate how much they loved Bahá'u'lláh. All marvelled that their testaments would be a "treasure" with their Lord.

Across the country many have expressed their greater appreciation of the importance of making provision for a final payment to the Right of God after their passing. "Huqúqu'lláh should be paid by a believer during the course of his life whenever his surplus property reaches the assessable level...when a Bahá'í dies, the only payment to Huqúqu'lláh which should need to be provided for in his Will is such additional liability as may be found to exist when his affairs are reckoned up as at the date of his death."⁵ Others said they were not aware of the need to make a final payment in this way, and appreciated being informed of this counsel. As one participant noted, "I realize now the need to go back and change my will, so that I can incorporate the Law of Huqúqu'lláh, as well as my testament of faith."

Some participants wrote that they had not thought about how to make it easy for their executor and family to honour the Right of God provisions in their will, promoting unity after their passing. They noted the need to share a copy of their

5 From a letter dated 1 October 1989 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh.

will and their accounting records so a final payment could be made on their behalf. The Representative for the Northwest Territories and Nunavut is also connecting friends across the two territories so they may assist one another in observing the Law. For example, a friend in Nunavut found executors from outside of the community. Another friend in a larger community in the Northwest Territories agreed to provide a friend in Nunavut with an example of a spreadsheet so he could keep track of his payments. Another exclaimed, "This was a Godsend! I felt that Bahá'u'lláh was speaking to me and helping me prepare for the next world!"

This year, the Bahá'í world celebrates 30 years since the Law of the Right of God was made universally applicable. To celebrate this occasion, the Deputies and Representatives invite further study of the "Wills" workshop, as well as other available materials, including *Work, Wealth and Service; New Attitude Cards; Family Life and Huqúqu'lláh*; and *Twelve Lessons on Huqúqu'lláh*. The friends should feel free to contact the Representative in their area for access to these resources, as well as with any questions about the Law of Huqúqu'lláh and to share their desire to study it further. If you are interested in organizing a "Wills" workshop, please contact your local Representative of the Right of God. We will be pleased to assist!

More information on provision in a will for the payment of Huqúqu'lláh, as well as a compilation on the Right of God, can be found at www.bahaicanada@bahai.ca.

Two-stage election process initiated in Ottawa and Toronto

Two localities are the first in Canada to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies in a two-stage process. The Spiritual Assemblies of Ottawa and Toronto contributed information for this article. It also includes comments made by community members who attended the elections.

In its 30 December 2021 message, the Universal House of Justice described a two-stage election process for Local Spiritual Assemblies: “Similar in many respects to the election of a National Spiritual Assembly, it involves the division of a locality into units from each of which one or more delegates are elected, after which the delegates elect the members of the Local Assembly.”

The message continues: “As the number of Bahá’ís residing in a locality grows large and the community’s capacity for managing complexity increases, the case for implementing a two-stage electoral process becomes commensurately stronger.”

In its message to the Feast of Dominion, the National Spiritual Assembly announced, “[A]t Ridván 2022, the two communities of Ottawa and Toronto became the first to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies in this manner,” linking the development to growth, as “[t]hese communities are also the first two clusters in Canada to be within clear reach of winning their goal of 1,000 core activities.”

Ottawa

News of the implementation of a two-stage election process brought much joy to the hearts of the friends in Ottawa as they recognized this endeavour as a continuation of the pattern where different aspects of Bahá’í community life have been decentralized since 2001, bringing activities closer to where individuals reside.



Ottawa believers in unit 7 gathered to carry out the historic first part of the two-stage election of its Local Spiritual Assembly.

There were many practical aspects to be arranged in a short period, including consideration of different methods to divide the city into units. In consultation with the Auxiliary Board members and with the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly, Ottawa was divided using the existing sector geographic boundaries as a foundation to form seven units.

The National Assembly’s announcement also led to greater efforts to reflect on the sacred nature of the Bahá’í electoral process. Shortly following the Feast, a five-week effort was undertaken to foster conversations regarding Bahá’í elections and the new two-stage process. Among other endeavours, this effort included phone calls, a home visit campaign coordinated by the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, consultation at two Feasts, deepenings arranged across the city, and the preparation of materials such as a recorded presentation, an infographic and a

“frequently asked questions” hand-out.

In the end, almost 250 friends engaged in conversations regarding the election process. These steps were accompanied by practical measures in each unit to facilitate voting by friends who were unable to attend the unit meetings, including drop-off points and ballot pick-up services, along with phone voting, e-voting and mail voting.

On April 10, friends in Ottawa gathered in seven locations across the city to carry out the historic first part of the two-stage election of its Local Spiritual Assembly. Each unit elected the allocated number of delegates and the meetings each had between 17 to 29 friends in attendance, enjoying the opportunity to be meeting in person for the first time in a long two years, while following public health guidelines.

Following reverent voting, the tellers retired to another room to count the votes while each site had

a program that included viewing the film *Glimpses of a Hundred Years of Endeavour*, reports from core activities within the unit, joyful live musical interludes, and a study of the 30 December 2021 message of the Universal House of Justice. In some locations, a tie-breaking vote took place before the election could be fully completed.

In total, 19 delegates were elected by the believers in seven units across the city. The Bahá'í community whole-heartedly responded to the call to participate in this new two-stage process. The overall election participation rate across the city was 46 percent, a level of participation not seen in Ottawa since 2010. Two of the units had participation rates of over 50 percent and a third a rate of over 60 percent, all of which are notable in the community of over 1,200 Bahá'ís.

Reflecting on the historic event, one Ottawa community member commented: “The first stage was joyous. The friends were enthusiastic and very happy to be called to take part in this special occasion, the first stage in a new electoral process.”

The 19 delegates went on to cast their ballots on April 19 in the second stage of the electoral process to raise up the Local Assembly of Ottawa. The second stage election gathering was arranged at the Bahá'í Centre with voting carried out in a rarefied atmosphere.

Toronto

With feelings of immense joy, the Toronto Assembly informed the community, on January 26, that as of Ríḍván this year, the election of the Assembly would be carried out via a two-stage electoral process — a method authorized by the Universal House of Justice, as a feature of the new Nine Year Plan.

This news was immediately seen as historic and was cherished as a collective victory for the community. It confirmed the growth and advances that had taken place in the cluster over the last years, as well as



Delegates who participated in-person in the second stage of Toronto's historic two stage election process, alongside an Auxiliary Board member.

the building of “the community’s capacity for managing complexity.”¹

Before the friends was the challenge of renewing their effort to “appreciate the sacredness of the electoral process and their duty to participate in it, in an atmosphere wholly free from the taint of suasion or worldly attitudes about power.”²

Beyond practical arrangements, the Spiritual Assembly, in close collaboration with the Auxiliary Board members, was eager to learn how the sacred nature of Bahá'í elections and the associated spiritual principles could be further advanced through a systematic conversation in the community.

Knowing how our awareness of the sacred nature of teaching increases our effectiveness as teachers of the Cause, the friends were invited to consider how their appreciation of the sacred nature of participating in Bahá'í elections might increase their effectiveness as electors.

They were also invited to recall occasions in their lives when they felt the presence of the sacred. For those who had the bounty of pilgrimage they might have memories of bowing down at the Sacred Thresholds. Other examples would include occasions of daily prayers, individual and collective.

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

2 Ibid.

To advance this conversation about the sacred nature of Bahá'í elections and the spiritual principles underpinning them, the Assembly organized a home visit campaign that was meant not to replace but enrich the meaningful conversations already taking place throughout the cluster and in neighbourhoods.

The home visit campaign saw about 100 friends arise to reach out to as many households as possible, but with over 1,000 households in the community, the friends were also invited to take steps on their own and some materials were prepared for all to have access to.

Daily online spaces were created to advance the conversation, and some of the core organizational team also had daily reflection spaces during the two weeks when the home visit campaign reached its highest level of intensity.

Folded “postcards” were mailed to all the friends to raise awareness, provide information, and facilitate easy access to the deepening themes. It included a link to a website which is still available at bahaitoronto.org/election.

At a more practical level, the city of Toronto was divided into nine electoral units. Voters were to elect delegates from among the adult believers in their own units who, in turn, would elect members of the Local Assembly from among all the adult believers in the entire city.

Nineteen delegates were elected across the city. Eight units elected two delegates, and one unit elected three delegates. The election of the delegates took place during the weekend of April 9-10. Participation was 28 percent, while the average participation in the previous six years had been around 20 percent.

The second stage of the election took place on April 19. Sixteen delegates attended the meeting in person, while all 19 participated in voting. The gathering was only an election meeting, with no consultative aspect, but with full concentration on prayers and the spiritually-charged assignment to be carried out.

At the annual meeting the following night, the results of the election were joyfully shared with the community.

One Toronto voter said, “Although I participated in the election of various Local Spiritual Assemblies over the years, it was a new and somewhat daunting experience being one of just 19 delegates electing the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Toronto. The study and reflection on the precious guidance — provided by the Assembly over several weeks — assisted greatly in preparation for the two-stage election process. There was a spiritually-uplifting and reverent atmosphere during both stages of the elections. It was helpful to speak with fellow delegates who shared similar sentiments — feeling a weight of responsibility but also feeling united in purpose.”

Another delegate commented, “I was excited about this new development in the electoral process. With the

community divided into nine units, for the first stage we had to think about voting for only two people from our unit. Stunned to find myself among the 19 elected delegates, what had been exciting suddenly felt very serious, heavy. Just 19 people were to prayerfully, selflessly elect the Spiritual Assembly serving the largest Bahá’í community in the largest city in Canada. But the challenge ultimately became a gift, helping me understand a little better the importance and sacredness of every single vote in a Bahá’í election.”

The Assembly and the Auxiliary Board members see this process as an initial step of learning and experience that will help refine aspects of the two-stage electoral process in the coming years.

Providing education: the signature contribution

In several localities across Canada, social action endeavours in the area of education illustrate the society-building power of the Faith.

“**T**he significance of education in the work of community building is unmistakable,” wrote the House of Justice in its 30 December 2021 message, “and in the field of social action the provision of education remains the signature contribution of Bahá’ís in most parts of the world.”¹ Social action endeavours in the area of education are multiplying across Canada, particularly in urban localities where “the availability of human resources” has increased, and “capacity for a wider range of tasks” has developed.² Naturally, developing the capacity to sustain the participation of a

sizeable number of young people in the programs of the training institute creates fertile conditions for educational endeavours of social action to emerge.

In the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont. teams of friends and pioneers have been working with junior youth and their families for over 15 years. As they laboured alongside the population and became more and more drawn into the life of the community, they saw the need for regular homework help. For a period of two years, the friends offered homework help at a neighbourhood centre four times a week after school. Some of the participants came from the junior youth program, while others were

attracted through organizations and schools, which were made aware of the initiative. When the pandemic hit, much of the homework help became one on one; junior youth would set up appointments with their animators to get assistance.

The experience gained over the years suggested to the team that although a space to help with homework was useful, many of the junior youth required more foundational assistance in subjects such as mathematics. As pandemic restrictions eased, smaller, weekly tutorial groups were formed that systematically study certain basic concepts in mathematics. These efforts are informed by insights the team has acquired from the training

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

2 Ibid.

[T]he team continues to be drawn into the life of society and learn more about the needs of their community...

institute, such as the emphasis placed on understanding concepts, over and above the transmission of information and the acquisition of skills. Carefully studying some of the texts of the program, such as *Habits of an Orderly Mind* and *Thinking About Numbers*, has been helpful in this regard.

As the team continues to be drawn into the life of society and learn more about the needs of their community, they have begun to notice further needs that also require attention. One is literacy, which remains at the heart of a lot of the junior youth's challenges in education. There are also needs in the area of nutrition, food security, and health. In relation to the latter, some initial efforts have been made to study materials with junior youth and accompany them to go out into the community to talk to their neighbours about these topics. After having these conversations, the junior youth developed newsletters capturing

some of what they had learned for members of the community to read.

Another experience comes from the Edmonds neighbourhood, in Burnaby, B.C. For over a decade, homefront pioneers and other friends have laboured in this locality to multiply the number of children's classes and junior youth groups, as well as to attract youth to the sequence of courses. As a result of these efforts, in recent years, a close relationship has developed between some of the animators and a community school, which many of the junior youth attend. A couple of animators are now members of the community council, which meets regularly to discuss matters relating to the school and the community.

In conversation with the principal of the school, the idea emerged to begin exploring the theme of technology with parents. The animators had long observed numerous issues related to the use of technology among junior youth—one group had even conducted a survey among peers and parents about social media use—and it seems the parents also had many questions in this regard. To address this need, the principal invited the animators to lead discussions on this topic at some of the community council meetings.

At the meeting, one mother shared that her children “couldn't fall asleep at night” because they were playing

games or using social media, so “we had to tell them not to use their devices after 6 p.m.” Other parents echoed these and other concerns, while also pointing out that social media allowed them to stay in touch with family living far away. The animators and other friends attending the meeting introduced insights from scientific research to help the parents understand the challenges associated with digital technology. They also considered the importance of consulting with their children, allowing them to be heard, even if the decisions are ultimately in the hands of the parents. There was interest in continuing such conversations, and the team has held other gatherings since then.

Another common form of social action in education is assisting older youth to reflect on and to take practical steps in relation to their postsecondary aspirations, and to align these with the aim of living a coherent life of service. In the McQuesten neighbourhood in Hamilton, Ont., for example, where community-building efforts have been under way for some 10 years, a spirit of support for young people has gradually developed, in which older friends reflect with youth on their aspirations and strengths. Drawing on this spirit, more deliberate and concerted initiatives have recently been undertaken to assist a group of young people in



A camp with youth from the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont. at the Bethany Bahá'í Centre of Learning in Bethany, Ont.



Youth in Hamilton, Ont. carry out an artistic activity related to the devotional character of the community.

the neighbourhood—some of whom had previously participated in the junior youth program—to navigate the postsecondary journey. Their experience in the institute has proven invaluable in this regard.

An older youth, who has served in the neighbourhood for many years and is currently undertaking her master’s degree in Toronto, set up a space for the high school students to explore an online portal that lists the available university programs.

This older youth acted like a mentor to the younger youth, holding multiple sessions to help them explore potential programs of study. In addition to this space, the high school students reached out to other older animators and tutors serving in the neighbourhood for more one-on-one support, particularly when it came to writing applications. Workshops were also organized for the youth to help them with practical questions, such as writing resumes and preparing for interviews, but

also to assist them to connect their experience serving the community with their decisions about work.

The youth have also been supported to consider scholarships and other forms of financial aid. In many cases, their study of the institute and their service make them excellent candidates for scholarships. The youth wrote many essays for these applications and all of them included mention of how their experience serving in the neighbourhood and their study of institute courses has helped them to grow. One youth shared that in writing scholarship and financial aid applications, he drew on his experience in the neighbourhood “because I felt like that really shows the contents of my character.” The courses of the Ruhi Institute, he continued, led to “tangible changes for me.”

These were common sentiments expressed by the youth. Another said, “Everything that we have learned and everyone we have met so far in the activities and things we have facilitated and coordinated... all helped me in terms of how I can expand my skills to other areas, because that’s all I know, teaching children about the Bahá’í Faith and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Bahá’u’lláh and all of our shared beliefs...being involved [in] the Bahá’í community ...helped me become a better student, a better worker at my work, and a better person.” Yet another youth shared how service in the community has “definitely helped me envision where I want to be in the future. It also helped me to learn to use my strengths in ways that can help the community...That helped me pick my career path and back up career paths that would allow me to do that in ways that I enjoy.”

The experiences described above, of which there are many more across the country, are a clear illustration of what the Universal House of Justice has recently indicated:

In many parts of the world, a natural outcome of the participation of individuals and families in the institute process has been

Friends serving as children's class teachers take a keen interest in the broad educational development of those they teach...

an increased consciousness of the importance of education in all its forms. Friends serving as children's class teachers take a keen interest in the broad educational development of those they teach, while friends

serving as tutors and animators are naturally concerned with the extent to which those approaching or entering adulthood—girls and boys alike—can access and benefit from education of many kinds, not limited to the courses offered by the institute itself. For instance, they can encourage young people to look towards apprenticeships or university studies. We have been struck by how, in many communities, engagement in the institute process by large numbers has gradually reshaped this aspect of culture within a population.³

“A clear sign that the society-building power of the Cause is being released in a cluster,” the House of Justice further explains, “is that

efforts are being made by a growing band of its inhabitants, inspired by the teachings of the Faith, to help improve the spiritual character and social conditions of the wider community to which they belong.”⁴ The emergence of social action initiatives in the area of education in localities where the programs of the training institute are well-established is an indication that we are learning about releasing the society-building power of the Faith—the overarching aim of the current series of global Plans.

– Ilya Zrudlo and Clara Haskell

³ From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 30 December 2021.

⁴ Ibid

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

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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

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

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

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