

BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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**Strengthening a
culture
of home visits**

From the Writings

O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which becometh them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light. – Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 31.

Teach your children the verses revealed from the heaven of majesty and power, so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the Tablets of the All-Merciful in the alcoves within the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkars*. Whoever hath been transported by the rapture born of adoration for My Name, the Most Compassionate, will recite the verses of God in such wise as to captivate the hearts of those yet wrapped in slumber. Well is it with him who hath quaffed the Mystic Wine of everlasting life from the utterance of his merciful Lord in My Name—a Name through which every lofty and majestic mountain hath been reduced to dust. – Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 150.

Do thou on behalf of 'Abdu'l-Bahá move the earth, carry the mortar, and haul the stones for the building of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* so that the rapture of this service may bring joy and gladness to the Centre of Servitude. That *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* is the first visible and manifest establishment of the Lord. Therefore, it is this servant's hope that each and every virtuous and righteous soul will sacrifice his all, evince great happiness and exultation, and rejoice in carrying the earth and mortar so that this Divine Edifice may be raised, the Cause of God may spread, and in every corner of the world the friends may arise with the utmost resolve to accomplish this great task. – 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet quoted in *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar—A Statement and Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, Note 77, extract 66.

Truly, pure and radiant hearts are the dawning-places of the mention of God from which the melodies of supplication and prayer continually reach the Concourse on high. I beg of God to make each of your hearts a divine temple in which the lamp of the Most Great Guidance may be lit. Should the hearts receive a bounty such as this, they would assuredly exert the utmost endeavour and become fully determined to build the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*, so that the outward frame may reveal the inward reality and the outer form give tidings of the inner meaning. – 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet quoted in *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar—A Statement and Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, Note 77, extract 66.

Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one true God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance. “The heaven hath sustenance for you”¹ but when sustenance is decreed it becometh available, whatever the means may be. When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or other liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man's thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet quoted in *Social Action—A Compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, par. 172.

O Lord, my God! Confirm them in Thy service! Strengthen their backs in bearing the stones for the erection of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*! O Lord, my God! Illumine the faces of these righteous ones with the light that shineth from the dawning-place of Thy mysteries. Verily, thou art the Mighty and the Unconstrained and verily, Thou art the Merciful and the Compassionate.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, From a Tablet translated from the Arabic quoted in *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar—A Statement and Compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, par. 82.

Although to outward seeming the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective center for men's souls. Every city in which, during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest. Gracious God! The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*, it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, par. 60.1.

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ON THE COVER Clockwise: Delegates visit the Temple site during National Convention; Friends in Tagish, Yukon; Study circle participants in Brampton, Ont.; Tutors carry out a home visit in Sudbury, Ont.; Pioneers to Tartu, Estonia visit their neighbours.

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Ridván message 2023

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2023.

Dearly loved Friends,

We feel tremendous joy to be addressing a community whose high-mindedness and high resolve are befitting of its high calling. How great, how very great is our love for you, and how our spirits soar as we see your sincere and devoted striving to live lives shaped by the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and to proffer the life-giving waters of His Revelation to a world that is sore athirst. Your strong sense of purpose is plain to see. Expansion and consolidation, social action, and participation in the discourses of society proceed apace, and the natural coherence of these undertakings at the level of the cluster is becoming ever more visible. Nowhere is this clearer than in places where growing numbers are becoming engaged in a range of endeavours, each one a means to release the society-building power of the Faith.

In the twelve months that have elapsed since the commencement of the Nine Year Plan, we have been delighted to see how this global spiritual enterprise has inspired and galvanized the friends and given impetus to particular lines of action. An immediate focus has been to put into effect plans which ensure that, in each country and region, there emerges at least one cluster where the third milestone has been passed: a place where large numbers of people are working together and contributing to the life of a vibrant community. Conscious, however, that the goal for this twenty-five-year period is to establish an intensive programme of growth in every cluster in the world, the believers have also set about opening new clusters to the Faith as well as intensifying their efforts in places with an existing programme of growth. There is a heightened awareness of the opportunity for pioneers to arise in all parts of the world—many devoted souls are considering how they might respond to this opportunity, and many others have already filled posts, noticeably on the home front but increasingly in the international field as well. This is one of several ways in which, as we had hoped, a spirit of mutual support is being expressed by the friends everywhere. Communities where strength has been built have committed themselves to supporting the progress being made in a different place—in another cluster, region, country, or even continent—and creative means have been found to offer encouragement from afar

and enable experience to be shared directly. Meanwhile, the basic approach of capturing what is being learned in a cluster, so that it can inform plans made locally and elsewhere, is widely practised. We have been gratified to see that particular attention is being paid to learning how to enhance the quality of the educational experience offered by the institute. When the institute process takes root in a community, its effects are dramatic. Witness, for instance, those centres of intense activity where the inhabitants have come to regard the training institute as a powerful instrument that is theirs: an instrument for whose sound development they have assumed principal responsibility. Knowing well that the doors of the Faith always stand wide open, the believers are learning how to give encouragement to those who are poised to enter. To walk with such souls, and to help them cross the threshold, is a privilege and a special joy; in each cultural context, there is much to be learned about the dynamics of this resonant moment of recognition and belonging. And that is not all. While in many clusters efforts to contribute to social transformation are at their earliest stages, National Spiritual Assemblies, ably supported as ever by the Counsellors, are actively seeking to learn more about how these efforts emerge from the community-building process. Discussions about the social and material well-being of a people are being cultivated within groups of families and in communities, while the friends are also finding ways to participate in meaningful discourses that are unfolding in their immediate surroundings.

Amid all we have described, the actions of the youth shine resplendent. Far from being mere passive absorbers of influence—whether the influence be benign or otherwise—they have proven themselves bold and discerning protagonists of the Plan. Where a community has seen them in this light and created conditions for their progress, the youth have more than justified the confidence shown in them. They are teaching the Faith to their friends and making service the foundation of more meaningful friendships. Frequently, such service takes the form of educating those younger than themselves—offering them not only moral and spiritual education, but often assistance with their schooling too. Charged with a sacred responsibility to strengthen the institute process, Bahá'í youth are fulfilling our cherished hopes.

The setting for all these efforts is a deeply unsettled age. There is widespread acknowledgement that the present-day structures of society are ill-prepared to address the needs of humanity in its current travails. Much that was widely assumed to be certain and unshakeable is being questioned, and the resulting ferment is producing a longing for a unifying vision. The chorus of voices

raised in support of oneness, equality, and justice shows how many share these aspirations for their societies. Of course, it is no surprise to a follower of the Blessed Beauty that hearts should long for the spiritual ideals which He propounded. But we nevertheless find it striking that, in a year when the prospects for humanity's collective progress have seldom seemed gloomier, the light of the Faith shone with astonishing brilliance in more than ten thousand conferences, attended by nearly one and a half million people, focused on the means of promoting those same ideals. Bahá'u'lláh's vision, and His exhortation to humankind to work in unity for the betterment of the world, was the centre round which diverse elements of society eagerly gathered—and no wonder, for as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, "Every community in the world findeth in these Divine Teachings the realization of its highest aspirations." Some well-wishers of humanity might first be drawn to the Bahá'í community as a place of refuge, a shelter from a world polarized and paralysed. Yet beyond a shelter, what they find are kindred souls labouring together to build the world anew.

Much could be written about the geographic spread of the conferences, the extraordinary impetus they imparted to the new Plan, or the heartfelt expressions of joy and enthusiasm they evoked from those who attended. But in these few lines we wish to draw attention to what they signified about the development of the Cause. They were a reflection of a Bahá'í community that sees kinship, not difference. This outlook made it natural to explore the Nine Year Plan at gatherings to which all were welcome. The friends considered the Plan's implications for their societies in the company of not only individuals and families, but local leaders and authority figures as well. Bringing together so many people in one place created the conditions for a transformative conversation about spiritual and social progress, one that is unfolding the world over. The special contribution that such gatherings—at once open, uplifting, and purposeful—can make to an expanding pattern of community development in a cluster is a valuable lesson for Bahá'í institutions to bear in mind for the future.

And so the company of the faithful enter the second year of the Plan with a fresh perspective and a profound insight into the significance of what they seek to achieve. How different actions look when viewed in light of the society-building power they release! This expansive prospect allows a sustained activity to be seen as much more than an isolated act of service or just a data point.

In place after place, the initiatives being pursued reveal a population learning how to take increasing responsibility for navigating the path of its own development. The resulting spiritual and social transformation manifests itself in the life of a people in a variety of ways. In the previous series of Plans, it could be seen most clearly in the promotion of spiritual education and collective worship. In this new series of Plans, increasing attention needs to be given to other processes that seek to enhance the life of a community—for example, by improving public health, protecting the environment, or drawing more effectively on the power of the arts. What is required for all these complementary aspects of a community's well-being to advance is, of course, the capacity to engage in systematic learning in all these areas—a capacity that draws on insights arising from the Teachings and the accumulated store of human knowledge generated through scientific enquiry. As this capacity grows, much will be accomplished over the coming decades.

This expanded, society-building vision has far-reaching implications. Each community is on its own path towards its realization. But progress in one place often has features in common with progress in another. One feature is that, as capacity increases and a local or national community's powers multiply, then, in the fullness of time, the conditions required for the emergence of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, set out in our Ridván 2012 message, will eventually be fulfilled. As we indicated in our message to you last Ridván, we will periodically identify places where a Bahá'í Temple is to be raised up. We are delighted to call, at this time, for the establishment of local Houses of Worship in Kanchanpur, Nepal, and Mwinilunga, Zambia. Beyond this,

we call for a national House of Worship to be raised up in Canada, in the vicinity of the long-established National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in Toronto. These projects, and others to be initiated in the future, will benefit from the support provided to the Temples Fund by the friends in every land.

Copious are the blessings that a benevolent Lord has chosen to bestow upon His loved ones. Lofty is the calling, magnificent the prospect. Pressing are the times in which we have all been summoned to serve. Impassioned, then, are the prayers with which, on your behalf and for your tireless efforts, we supplicate at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh.

– The Universal House of Justice

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Election of the Universal House of Justice

To all National Spiritual Assemblies,
1 May 2023.

The newly elected members of the Universal House of Justice are Chuungu Malitonga, Paul Lample, Juan Francisco Mora, Ayman Rouhani, Payman Mohajer, Shahriar Razavi, Praveen Mallik, Andrej Donoval, Albert Nshisu Nsunga.

– The Universal House of Justice



Members of the Universal House of Justice elected at Riḍvan 2023, and serving for a five-year term.

Photo: Bahá'í World News Service

Release of film “An Expansive Prospect”

To all National Spiritual Assemblies,
30 April 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are pleased to inform you that the Universal House of Justice specially commissioned a film to be produced for presentation at the Thirteenth International Bahá'í Convention. The film, entitled *An Expansive Prospect*, looks at four places in the world, capturing the efforts of individuals, communities, and institutions as they strive to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. The film is available for download or online viewing at bahai.org/expansive-prospect.

The House of Justice wishes the film to be made available to all the friends, who will no doubt benefit from sharing and discussing it with relatives, friends, classmates, co-workers, and those previously unmet...

Currently on the Bahai.org website there are versions of the film with subtitles in English, French, Persian, Russian, and Spanish. A version with Arabic subtitles will be uploaded soon. Versions of the film with voice-overs in these languages will be posted on this website in the coming weeks; the one in Arabic is already online...

May this film be a source of hope and encouragement for those friends who arise and exert themselves, individually and collectively, for the betterment of society.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– Department of the Secretariat

Archives of Bahá'í Persecution in Iran website

To all National Spiritual Assemblies,
9 May 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Since the earliest days of the new Revelation, the believers in the Cradle of the Faith have been the target of relentless persecution. The earliest records of the sustained and brutal attacks on the friends of God are those faithfully documented by notable early Bahá'í chroniclers as well as Western observers present in Iran. Regrettably, although it has waxed and waned over the years, the persecution has continued throughout the history of the Cause and has greatly intensified in recent years. There is therefore a vast body of documents that chart the course of this persecution and its countless incidents.

In order to make these important records more accessible, the Bahá'í International Community has been engaged in the development of a website dedicated to the documentation of the persecution called Archives of Bahá'í Persecution in Iran, which can be accessed at iranbahaipersecution.bic.org. The website, available in both English and Persian, sheds light on the decades-long, systematic persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran and covers a wide range of incidents including systematic discrimination, arrests and imprisonments, physical violence and executions, economic oppression and deprivation, exclusion from education, acts of property destruction and cemetery desecration, and propaganda and incitement to hatred.

This unique collection now contains more than 10,000 documents, images, and audio and video records of instances of persecution in Iran dating back as far as 1848, although the great majority of cases represented in the archive relate to the most recent wave of persecutions that has occurred since 1979. These records, which include copies of government and judicial documents, clerical fatwas, newspaper articles, and other accounts, are presented not only as images of original documents but, importantly, have also been transcribed and made available in text format in Persian and with English

translations. The monumental work undertaken to date means that this site has now developed into a resource of unparalleled significance, not only for historians, researchers, film-makers, journalists, and human rights advocates, but also for individuals who may wish to learn about and remember the sacrifices made by their own friends and family members.

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to formally bring the existence of this website to your attention as a resource to assist the worldwide Bahá'í community in defending the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran and to support a more effective communication of the scope and severity of the persecution to governments, civil society, and the media.

The upsurge in the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran in recent months has given rise to countless expressions of concern and support from leaders of thought, politicians, human rights advocates, and many others. The current social turmoil enveloping Iran has also demonstrated that the oppression which has been suffered by the Bahá'ís for generations is now being visited upon a broad cross section of the Iranian people, with the result that the example of constructive resilience as well as patience which the Bahá'ís have demonstrated throughout the many decades of persecution is becoming increasingly recognized and examined. Although the website presents a collection of the records of the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, it is an example to all of how injustice could be documented, so that lessons can be learned from history as humanity moves towards the stage of its collective maturity.

As the website continues to develop and expand in scope, individuals and families may send copies of documents or other records of persecution that they have in their possession for possible inclusion on this site. A document submission portal is available on the website itself, or alternatively, items may be sent by email to admin@iranbahaipersecution.bic.org.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– Department of the Secretariat

Appointment of the members of the International Teaching Centre

To all National Spiritual Assemblies, 15 May 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With joyful hearts we announce the appointment of the members of the International Teaching Centre for the five-year term beginning 23 May 2023: Antonella Demonte, Gloria Javid, Dinesh Kumar, Kanagaratnam Lakmeharan, Rachel Ndegwa, Amir Saberín, Navid Serrano, Mehranguiz Farid Tehrani, and Holly Woodard.

– The Universal House of Justice



Orange tree from Mazra'ih. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Message regarding membership of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe

To all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 June 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Mrs. Marina Bruckmann of Austria to the membership of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe to fill the vacancy created by the recent appointment of Dr. Amir Saberín as a member of the International Teaching Centre. We have called upon Counsellor Varqá Khadem to take up the duties of Trustee of the Continental Fund for Europe, replacing Dr. Saberín in that function.

– The Universal House of Justice



Door at Mazra'ih. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Message regarding pilgrimage

To all National Spiritual Assemblies, 28 June 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In light of the current security concerns in Israel, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following.

Effective immediately, it is not possible for the Department of Pilgrimage to include non-Bahá'ís in the invitations to believers to come on pilgrimage or for brief visits except

when these individuals are the parents, children, or spouses of the Bahá'ís who will accompany them. Kindly inform the friends in your community about this development.

The disappointment that some friends may experience as a result of this necessary step is regretted, and it is earnestly hoped that this restriction can be lifted at some point in the future. Prospective pilgrims and brief visitors may address their questions to the Department of Pilgrimage at pilgrimage@bwc.org or by telephone at +972 4 835 8511.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– Department of the Secretariat



Mansion of Mazra'ih. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Changes in the flow of literature

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, 17 May 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Over the past two decades, there has been a remarkable rise in the capacity to teach the Cause of God, drawing larger and larger numbers of individuals and families into contact with the Word of God, raising participation in core activities and developing capabilities to teach and build vibrant communities in which the material and spiritual are joined. An implication of this rising capacity is the need to ensure the flow of literature in a timely manner. This is particularly so for institute materials that are so vital to the work of teaching and community building. Following a series of consultations exploring the needs for literature, the National Spiritual Assembly has made several decisions to help strengthen its flow.

Given the importance of institute material to the work of expansion and consolidation, the National Assembly has decided to wholly subsidize the cost of institute material effective immediately, providing access to all published and pre-published educational materials free of charge within Canada. Naturally, those who wish to pay for the materials are welcome to do so. It is the hope of the National Assembly that this action will simplify access to this content.

The National Assembly has also decided to adopt a decentralized order fulfillment system to strengthen the flow of institute materials in each region of the country in a manner that is responsive to the requirements of growth. This new system, which includes a new online portal to order materials, will be administered by the institute board in each region with support from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and we will be in touch with further information as the system is launched. For the time being, there is no change to the way you currently order institute materials.

Finally, while the above decisions concern the distribution of institute materials, work is also underway to modernize the web presence of the Bahá'í Distribution Service and to simplify its ordering and fulfillment process. An aim is to provide a modern website with information on a wide selection of enrichment literature in both print and digital formats, with direct e-commerce and inventory tracking capability. It is our hope that this work will be completed in the coming year. To guide these changes and follow the related process of learning about facilitating the flow of literature, the National Assembly has just appointed a Publication and Distribution Board. They are gradually assuming their responsibilities, and may be reached at publication-distribution@bahai.ca.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils, and Registered Groups, 23 May 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are happy to share with you the results of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly on Sunday, 21 May 2023. The following individuals were elected by the delegates at the National Convention to serve as members of the National Spiritual Assembly for

the coming year: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Hoda Farahmandpour, Gerald Filson, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca and Karen McKye.

In addition, the National Assembly is pleased to convey the results of the election of its officers on 2 June 2023: Chair – Ciprian Jauca; Vice-chair – Hoda Farahmandpour; Treasurer – Mehran Anvari; Secretary – Karen McKye.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Universal House of Justice response to 2023 National Convention message

To the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 21 June 2023.

How we loved to receive the message from the delegates at your National Convention and to learn of their constructive consultations and of that special moment of devotion in which they stood together in the spot where a national House of Worship is now to be built. This spiritual victory belongs to all the friends in Canada and is a reflection of their devoted labours over many years to raise up a glowing spirit of worship

and service in that land. As efforts to raise the House of Worship now begin in earnest, we are aware that it is but one of the broad range of interconnected endeavours that the dear friends are advancing in pursuit of the goals of the Nine Year Plan, hand in hand with all who share the same noble aims for the peoples of Canada. To the prayers of the delegates at your Temple site and the prayers of children, youth, and adults in thousands of homes across your vast land, we add our own, offered at the Sacred Threshold, that the devoted services of the friends in Canada may quicken the process of spiritual and social transformation they champion.

– The Universal House of Justice

Letter from the delegates to the Universal House of Justice

To the Beloved Universal House of Justice, 22 May 2023.

We bow our heads in humble gratitude for the manifest bounty that Canada received at Ridván: a perfect bestowal, a wondrous gift—our national House of Worship. It is difficult to express the joy and ecstasy of the assembled delegates, spiritually invigorated by a reverent visit to the Temple site, as we envisioned the expansive prospect ahead of our national community. We understand that our National Spiritual Assembly has already indicated that our community will be able to shoulder the entirety of the costs associated with the raising up of the Temple during the Nine Year Plan; the delegates were delighted and eagerly affirmed our intention to do so, to partake of this fleeting bounty.

The spirit of the International Convention—conveyed by members of the outgoing National Assembly and our two beloved resident Counsellors, Ayafor Temengye Ayafor and Borna Noureddin—permeated the preparations, consultations, and the election itself. All 171 delegates voted in the rarefied atmosphere of the election, in which all ballots were valid. On the eve of the 40th anniversary

of the martyrdom of ten Bahá'í women in Shiráz, which we remembered together in our devotions, we recommit ourselves to continue Canada's long-standing history of defending the believers in Iran.

The Counsellors' contributions, especially the insights shared from their recent Conference, were indispensable in framing and illuminating our consultations. Viewing the film, *An Expansive Prospect*, also helped us reflect on what we are learning. The experience emerging about working with groups of families, with mothers at the forefront, and the implications of an expansive view of the institute, were particularly thrilling. We rejoiced in the recent movement of a number of new clusters past the third milestone. Inspiring stories about youth and whole families enrolling in the Faith were on many of the delegates' lips, and experiences teaching specific populations, such as the Indigenous, French Canadian, Chinese, and Persian, among others, were discussed. An appendix to the National Assembly's annual report explored the strengthening of the institute in Indigenous populations across Canada, which was most heartening, given that our destinies are intertwined. Many delegates were curious about efforts under way in the areas of social action and public discourse, and some shared glimpses of social transformation occurring in their clusters. The

implications on material means for raising up a national House of Worship, in addition to strengthening various processes at all levels of our community, were not lost upon the delegates. We were also blessed to receive a message and presentation from our Board of Trustees of the Right of God, which helped us reflect on the profound significance and increase our love of that law. Throughout the Convention, the consultations were marked by a high degree of joy, unity, and fellowship. And of course, we were uplifted by the loving presence of Dr. Firaydoun and Mrs. Vida Javaheri.

Again, a thousand times over, we are deeply grateful for this gift the Universal House of Justice has bestowed upon our nation, upon all the peoples of Canada. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said that, “To express his gratitude for the favours of God man must show forth praiseworthy actions. In response to these bestowals he must render good deeds,

be self-sacrificing, loving the servants of God, forfeiting even life for them, attracted to the Kingdom of Abhá, the face radiant, the tongue eloquent, the ear attentive, striving day and night to attain the good pleasure of God. Whatsoever he wishes to do must be in harmony with the good pleasure of God. He must observe and see what is the will of God and act accordingly. There can be no doubt that such commendable deeds are thankfulness for the favours of God.”

The Bahá’í community of Canada pledges itself to show forth this kind of thankfulness, unremittingly seeking the good pleasure of the Universal House of Justice.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

– Delegates at the 73rd Canadian National Convention

Letter from the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh to the 2023 National Convention

To the delegates gathered for the 73rd National Convention of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 19 May 2023.

Dear Friends,

With hearts filled with love, the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada greets you all at this historic moment for our country, as we celebrate the news of the establishment of a national House of Worship in Canada. We are most grateful to the National Spiritual Assembly for this opportunity to convey our love to you and to share a few thoughts on the Right of God and its implications for daily life.

Every day, each of us encounters a constant barrage of ideals, attitudes and lifestyle choices that are aimed at promoting materialism; it is inescapable. At work, at school, while shopping, as well as in our interactions on social media, our ‘wants’ are labelled as ‘needs’ and a life based on material gain is assigned the highest value. We are witnessing the widening of the gap between the extremes of wealth and poverty at a rate never seen before. *“Even with the noblest of efforts to acquire wealth through just means, the ‘widening economic divide between the rich and the poor’ within all of the world’s economies, a sure sign of injustice, illustrates the importance of the law*

*of Ḥuqúqu’lláh as a means to purify wealth gained within such systems and contribute to building a just society.”*¹

In its 1 March 2017 letter to the Bahá’ís of the World, the Universal House of Justice calls on us to be engaged in a constant state of transformation wherein our actions match our ideals. *“If a new model of community life, patterned on the teachings, is to emerge, must not the company of the faithful demonstrate in their own lives the rectitude of conduct that is one of its most distinguishing features? Every choice a Bahá’í makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfil those aims.”*² With firm belief in the fundamental principle of the oneness of humanity and aware that our actions and choices impact our brothers and sisters throughout the world, the Right of God, when integrated into our daily lives, becomes a practical means to help Bahá’ís bring their lives into conformity with the high ideals we espouse.

This law extends far beyond the calculation of our surplus wealth, and is much more than a simple financial transaction. It is a powerful tool for bringing spiritual

- 1 The International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, 7 September 2014 letter to all Boards of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.
- 2 The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017 letter to the Bahá’ís of the World.

principles into our material lives. The practice of reflecting individually on what expenditures are necessary and which are not can help us act with moderation, preventing wasteful spending and the accumulation of debt. *“By nurturing self-discipline and concern for the betterment of others, this mighty law enhances social consciousness. Our young generation no longer considers Ḥuqúqu’lláh merely as a material means of expanding the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, but rather as a multidimensional injunction that binds together love and law with the goal of serving humanity”*³. Applying the Right of God in our daily lives influences the conversations that we have in each other’s homes and how we approach the society-building activities in our communities. Considering our wants and needs changes our interactions with society; we begin to consider others’ needs before our pleasures, we make moderate choices, we control our lower nature by calling on our spiritual nature ahead of our material needs. *“Examining one’s life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one’s obligation in relation to the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh*

³ Dr. ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, 27 September 2007 letter to a conference on the Right of God in Canada.

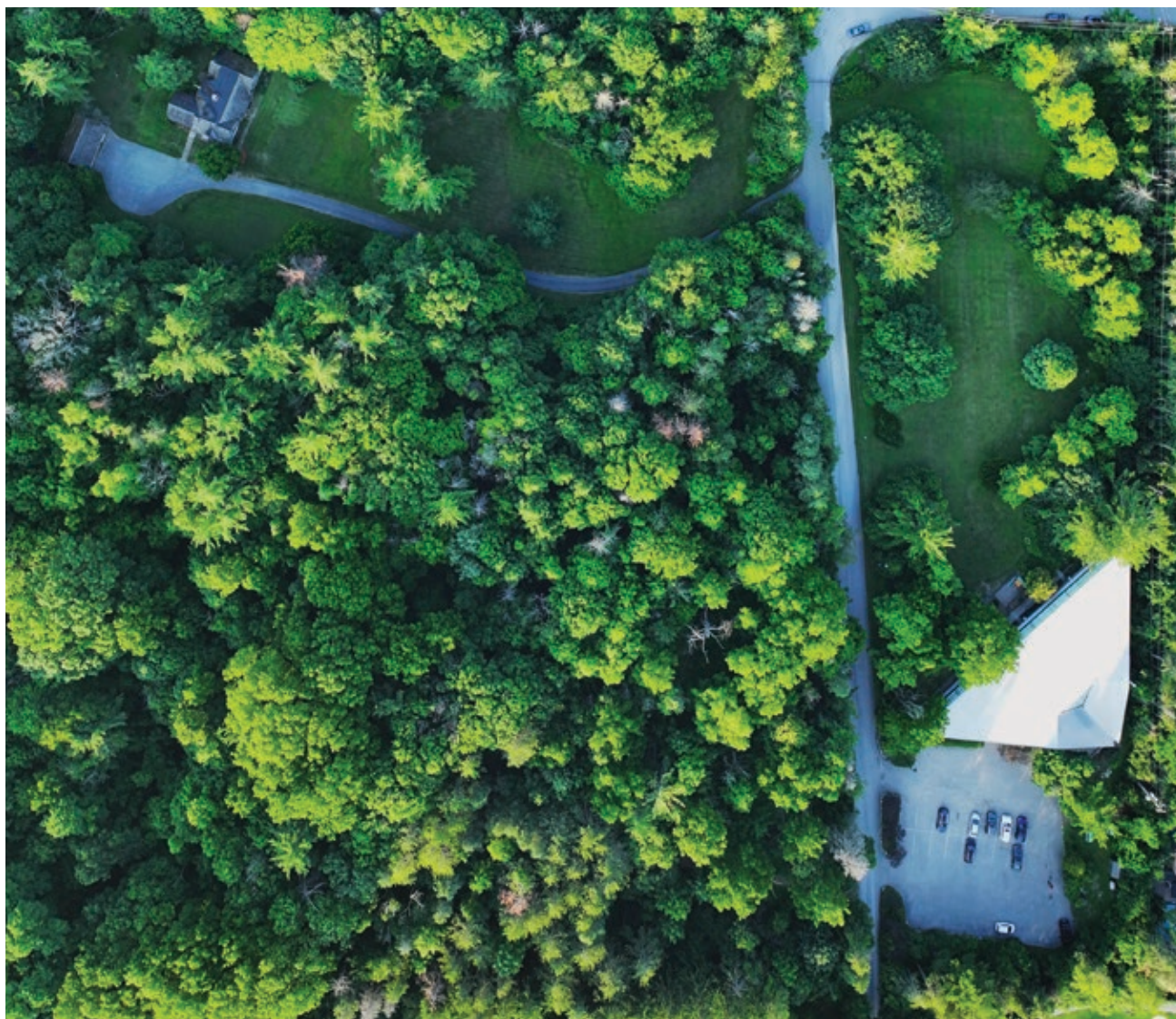
*is an indispensable discipline to bring one’s priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good.”*⁴ This law, not meant to cause hardship, but rather to be the means of attracting the blessings and bounties of God, should be a source of joy and radiance for all of us.

Dear Friends, the members of this institution, the Representatives and Deputy Trustees, stand ready to support each believer in fostering a deeper understanding of the tenets of the Law and its application in our daily lives. We invite every Canadian Bahá’í to reflect on how the Law of the Right of God has impacted, and will continue to impact, their daily life — and beyond this, how it can have a profound effect on us not only as individuals, but also as families, communities, and members of institutions.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada

⁴ The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017 letter to the Bahá’ís of the World.



Aerial view of the Bahá’í National Centre and Temple Land in Markham, Ont. Photo: Susan Sheper

About this issue

In its 6 February 2023 message to unit conventions, the National Spiritual Assembly urged our “reflection on what is needed to strengthen a culture of home visits where meaningful conversations unfold, ties of spiritual kinship are forged, a sense of community is strengthened, faith is deepened, and plans are made.”

The letter goes on to describe the “role of the training institute in building capabilities that enable us to contribute to meaningful and uplifting conversation.” It continues: “Indeed, not only Book 2, but each of the books in the sequence seeks to build this capacity...”

Since then, the rich pattern of home visits throughout Canada has expanded and deepened. In the feature article of this issue, “Home visits build culture and community,” friends in four different localities share their experience with carrying out systematic home visits—whether in the context of a community in a condominium, a group of families, or among the parents of junior youth. Home visits seem to actualize the concept of building unity articulated in the Bahá’í Writings.

This is the first issue of Bahá’í Canada since the joyous news contained in the Universal House of Justice’s Riḍván message this year, that “a national House of Worship” is “to be raised up in Canada, in the vicinity of the long-established National Ḥaẓíratu’l-Quds in Toronto.”

Through a review of materials in the Canadian Bahá’í Archives, the story “A history of Canada’s National Ḥaẓíratu’l-Quds and Maṣḥríqu’l-Adhkar” was woven together, recounting the challenging and miraculous circumstances surrounding the National Assembly’s acquisition of the property for these institutions 70 years ago, guided by the Guardian.

Also in the “From the History” section, we go further back in time to explore the life of Aḥmad of Yazd, who was the recipient of Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Aḥmad, recited by many in times of difficulty. After receiving the tablet and reflecting on its content, Aḥmad travelled extensively, visiting the homes of many Babís to proclaim the coming of Bahá’u’lláh.

An article, previously published on bahaicanada.bahai.ca, describes the 73rd Bahá’í National Convention, which took place in May in Toronto, Ont., during which delegates completed their twin duties of electing the National Spiritual Assembly and consulting on the vision

before Canada. Delegates, joined by two members of the Continental Board of Counsellors, studied the Riḍván message, celebrated the achievements of the Canadian Bahá’í community, shared learning, and envisioned next steps.

In the National Assembly’s call to strengthen the culture of home visits, “where meaningful conversations unfold, ties of spiritual kinship are forged, a sense of community is strengthened, faith is deepened, and plans are made”, it asked “What elements of current culture—habits of thought and behaviour—may be obstacles to overcome?”

In the article “Home visits and social forces,” Michael Sabet uses elements of social theory put forward by philosopher Jürgen Habermas to reflect on elements of our current culture and articulate how the institute process shapes our exercise of free will. Through collectively building our capacity to carry out home visits, read reality, consult, and plan, we are influencing culture.

Social action initiatives have continued to emerge across the country, particularly in neighbourhoods where the institute process is gaining in strength. The article “Mental health workshops focus on youth” describes how concepts from the training institute—such as true friendship and service—were used to address mental health challenges among young people in Brampton, Ont. and Montreal, Que.

Among many goals of the Nine Year Plan, pioneering has once again come into focus—both internationally, as Canada has been assigned particular goals,¹ and on the homefront. In this issue, the first family to pioneer internationally during the Nine Year Plan describes how they decided to relocate to Tartu, Estonia. As more pioneers arrive at their posts, we hope to continue to share their stories as ties between clusters in Canada and those abroad strengthen through shared learning.

In reflecting on the bounty of raising up a National House of Worship at this time, we invite you to read the passages in the “From the Writings” section, which contains excerpts from the compilation *The Institution of the Maṣḥríqu’l-Adhkar*, prepared by the research department of the Universal House of Justice.

¹ Canada’s international goals include Belize, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Dominica, Estonia, Greenland, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, the Leeward Islands, Lithuania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Submitting stories to Bahá’í Canada

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



The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada alongside members of the Continental Board of Counsellors at the construction site of the current National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, in 1973. Front row (Counsellors), from left: Velma Sherril, Edna True, Sara Pereira, Lloyd Gardner. Back row: Hossain Danesh, Douglas Martin, Elizabeth Rochester, Jameson Bond, Ed Muttart, Husayn Banani, Ronald Parsons, Michael Rochester. Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

A history of Canada's National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

Details surrounding the evolution of these two institutions, particularly relating to obtaining properties for their construction, from the time of the Guardian until the present day.

In 1948, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada became a separate entity from the joint National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada. On 19 June 1949, the Guardian first introduced the idea of a House of Worship to the new National Spiritual Assembly: “The development of the local and national Funds must be continuously maintained as a prelude to the establishment of local and national endowments and the ultimate erection of a House of Worship that will incarnate the soul of a flourishing nation-wide community.”¹

When the Ten Year Crusade launched five years later, in 1953, the Guardian gave the Canadian Bahá'í community seven objectives. Among these were “two paramount objectives”: to open 13 virgin territories to the Faith through pioneering, and to purchase land for “the Mother Temple of the Dominion of Canada.”²

This latter objective was closely tied to the establishment of a National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds³—a building to be the administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith in Canada.

Acquiring properties for both a Temple and Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds was a complicated challenge that spanned decades. In the Foreword of *Messages to Canada*, the collection of the Guardian's letters to Canada, this is addressed:

Whenever response was unduly slow or energies flagged, Shoghi Effendi was in no way reluctant to press those matters which deeply concerned him. Perhaps the most vexed single issue was the difficulty which the National Spiritual Assembly appeared to have in acquiring a suitable site for its first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and even an appropriate property for its national Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds. As delay followed delay and one after another of the Assembly's optimistic expectations proved illusory, letters from the Guardian's secretaries expressed growing concern.⁴

1 Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to the National Spiritual Assembly, 19 June 1949. Published in *Messages to Canada*, 2nd ed. Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1999, p. 114.

2 Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to the National Spiritual Assembly, 20 June 1953. *Messages to Canada*, p. 182-3.

3 Translates to “The Sacred Fold.”

4 Douglas Martin. From *Messages to Canada*, Foreword, p. x.

Achieving this goal required the continual strengthening of institutional capacity at a time when three members of the National Assembly resigned to settle in pioneer posts early in the Ten Year Crusade.⁵ In addition to the National Spiritual Assembly, a key actor was an appointed Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee, whose members were responsible for identifying and vetting potential sites that could later be considered by the National Assembly, as well as to navigate the many administrative functions required of such a venture. The Committee's minutes and correspondence with the National Spiritual Assembly are a key source of information regarding this time.⁶

Establishing Canada's National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds

The goal of finding a Ḥazíratu'l-Quds appears to have begun with Hand of the Cause Siegfried Schopflocher. In a cable dated 29 February 1952, the Guardian wrote "RECENTLY URGED NEWLY-APPOINTED HAND OF CANADA, ON OCCASION OF HIS PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND, TO UNDERTAKE PRELIMINARY MEASURES IN CONJUNCTION WITH CANADIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL ḤAZÍRATU'L-QUDS SIMILAR TO THOSE ALREADY FOUNDED IN TEHERAN, WILMETTE, BAGHDAD, SYDNEY, FRANKFURT, CAIRO AND NEW DELHI.⁷ Mr. Schopflocher informed the National Spiritual Assembly that the Hazíra is different from a Shrine or Temple, is to be a building befitting its use as national headquarters, should contain an Assembly Hall, Committee rooms, Archives space, publishing space, and that the first duty of the National Spiritual Assembly is to decide the location, and second whether to rent or build. In April 1952, the National Spiritual Assembly decided that the location would be Greater Toronto.⁸

The Guardian himself contributed financially, cabling in May: "ARRANGING SEND TWO THOUSAND POUNDS MY CONTRIBUTION FUTURE HAZIRA URGE ENERGETIC EFFORTS."⁹ On 8 June 1952, Shoghi Effendi wrote "The selection of the city to serve as the seat of the national Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in the Dominion of Canada; the purchase of either a plot to serve as a site for the construction of this Edifice, or, preferably, of a building to serve as a provisional national administrative headquarters for a rising, steadily expanding community ..." were two of "the imperative needs of the present hour."¹⁰

5 John Robarts, Rosemary Sala and Emeric Sala left during the 1953-4 year. This was stated in a letter from the National Assembly to the Guardian dated 27 January 1954, *Canadian Bahá'í Archives*.

6 All unpublished correspondence referenced in this article is from the National Spiritual Assembly's archives.

7 *Canadian Bahá'í News*, issue 29, May 1952, p.1

8 Meeting minute #299, 5 April 1952. Memorandum from Douglas Martin to members of the National Spiritual Assembly summarizing National Spiritual Assembly minutes concerning the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, 24 January 1968.

9 Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to the National Spiritual Assembly, 14 May 1952, *Messages to Canada*, p. 153.

10 Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to the National Spiritual Assembly, 8 June 1952, *Messages to Canada*, p. 158-159.

However, purchasing land was complex as the development of the city of Toronto expanded northward. In the July 1952 issue of *Canadian Bahá'í News*, the National Spiritual Assembly reported that, in light of the urgency expressed by the Guardian, the Hazíra Committee is to continue its search for a suitable building in the Toronto area, not exceeding \$50,000 in value and to report at the next meeting.¹¹ In the October 1952 issue of the *News*, the National Assembly relayed that several other National Spiritual Assemblies had also contributed financially to the purchase of the Hazíra.¹² By December it shared with the community that, at its October 1952 meeting, the National Assembly decided to purchase a property at 188 St. George Street, in downtown Toronto.

A special issue of *Canadian Bahá'í News* in January 1953 focused on the purpose of the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, and reflected on the significance of this achievement:

It is clear that the function of our Ḥazíratu'l-Quds is to unite and bring together the manifold activities of the Faith across the land and to provide a centre from which the spiritual power generated by our divinely appointed Administrative Order may radiate. Such a headquarters, then, will be the symbol of our national solidarity and the focal centre of all our future growth. In addition it is clear from the Guardian's words that our Hazíra will serve to raise the prestige of the Faith in Canada and indeed the prestige of the Faith throughout the world. It is for this latter reason that the Guardian has asked all the National Spiritual Assemblies of the world to contribute to the erection of our Hazíra. It stands along with the election of our own National Spiritual Assembly, and the undertaking of our Five Year Plan, as the most significant demonstration of our emergence as an independent entity within the world community of Bahá'u'lláh.

Unfortunately, 188 St. George St. had to be sold the following year, as it required renovations to permit public use, and they were too costly.¹³ At the same time however, the Ten Year Plan goal to acquire land for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar had just been assigned to Canada. That summer, a search began for land within driving distance of Toronto that would fulfill the Guardian's request for a site for the Temple and permit the building of the Hazíra on the adjacent property.¹⁴ It would be some years before a property that accommodated both would be found.

Two more buildings for the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, 539 Mount Pleasant Road and 274 Huron Street, were purchased and sold by 1957. The first was purchased in June 1955 and deemed unusable by May 1956 due to difficulties with fire regulations.¹⁵ The property on Huron Street,

11 *Canadian Bahá'í News*, issue 31, July 1952, p. 6.

12 *Canadian Bahá'í News*, issue 34, October 1952, p. 2.

13 *Canadian Bahá'í News*, August 1953, p. 3.

14 *Canadian Bahá'í News*, October 1953, p. 3 describes the sale of 188 St. George and the new quest for land for the Temple that could also accommodate a Hazíra.

15 Memorandum from Douglas Martin to members of the National Spiritual Assembly about the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, 24 January 1968.

acquired in 1956 and briefly used for meetings and one National Convention, was expropriated for the expansion of the University of Toronto within the year.¹⁶ By July 1957 the National Assembly purchased a house, 15 Lola Road, located near Yonge and Davisville, to be used as the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds. This became the national headquarters of the Faith until 1969.

The search for a Temple property

The pressing issue of finding and purchasing a property for a future House of Worship in Canada was still outstanding, however. Criteria for the site for the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* evolved through correspondence with the Guardian as the National Spiritual Assembly and its Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee sought to achieve this Ten Year Plan goal. In late 1953, the Committee recommended a site of over 100 acres in Richmond Hill¹⁷, to which the Guardian replied, by cable on 19 March 1954, "PROPOSED AREA TOO FAR TOO EXPENSIVE."¹⁸

In May 1954, a valiant effort by the Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee involved sending an open letter to 780 real estate agents in Toronto outlining the National Assembly's criteria for a temple site. This letter described the House of Worship as open to "anyone of any creed, probably in the order of 150-220 feet high and some 100-150 feet in diameter" and "the surrounding grounds being suitably landscaped to show off such a structure." In the corner would be placed a small unobtrusive office building. The criteria sought included a site of some eight to nine acres and not more than 12 miles from the city centre (designated as the intersection of Yonge and Bloor), with serviced water, not zoned for industry, accessible by public and private transportation, that it possesses desirable natural features, and does not exceed \$45,000.¹⁹ Apparently, they were not taken seriously by many realtors who did not find this feasible.²⁰ Nevertheless, about 60 sites were visited as a result, with six recommended.²¹

The 15 June 1954 letter from the Guardian elaborated on the 19 March 1954 cable:

As he has already informed you by cable, he feels that the land which you proposed as a Temple and National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds site was altogether too large, too expensive, and above all, too far from the city limits. He has given similar instructions to a number of other national bodies who were pursuing their investigations in a direction much the same as your own. He realizes that it is difficult, and much more expensive, to find a plot close to the heart of the city. On the other hand, he

feels that even a small plot, near to town, is much more reasonable from every standpoint than a large plot way out in the country. The friends must remember that they have to be able to get out to their National Centre and their National Temple and use them; and, as Bahá'ís are all busy, hardworking people for the most part, the time involved must inevitably influence their attendance at Bahá'í meetings in the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, and later, Bahá'í services in the Temple.

On 5 October 1954, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote to the Guardian with revised criteria for the property and with a summary of the initiative to write to the 780 realtors. Options were presented to Shoghi Effendi about acquiring separate properties, the Hazíra within Toronto, and a separate Temple property, or for a combined Temple and Hazíra property from nine to 17 miles from the heart of Toronto, amongst other potential criteria.²² On 27 October 1954, Shoghi Effendi provided specific advice about distance and size: "ADVISE SUGGESTED TEMPLE SITE ABOUT NINE MILES FROM HEART TORONTO AREA ABOUT THREE ACRES."²³ Together with this guidance, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote back to the Guardian in December outlining the revised criteria it had given the Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee for the site. Revisions included that the area should be about three acres, approximately nine miles from the heart of Toronto, the cost not to exceed approximately \$10,000 per acre and "should have as many other desirable features as possible as would give prominence to the building and provide an adequate setting." Should a building upon it be suitable for a provisional Hazíra, it should not cost more than a further \$30,000. The Guardian replied to this letter on 1 January: "APPROVE CONTENTS LETTER DECEMBER 15."²⁴

With the revised criteria approved by the Guardian and presented to the Committee, the list of suitable properties was reduced to four, and a site just off Woodbine, "immediately North-East from the new cloverleaf on no. 401 highway" was identified.²⁵ This was surplus land belonging to the Department of Highways, which the National Assembly began negotiations to purchase.²⁶

On 20 March 1955, the Guardian wrote to the National Assembly of the United States, stating that he was "greatly concerned over the delay in the purchase of a Ḥazíratu'l-Quds and the Temple land in Toronto" asking them to "render the Canadian Assembly every assistance...so that these projects can be concluded at an early date."²⁷

22 National Spiritual Assembly to Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, 5 October 1954.

23 Cable from Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 27 October 1954. *Messages to Canada*, p.212.

24 National Spiritual Assembly to Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, 15 December 1954; Cable from Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to National Spiritual Assembly, 1 January 1955 (GL1-111-21).

25 Report of meeting of Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee to the National Spiritual Assembly 5 January 1955.

26 From the Annual Report of the Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 27 March 1955.

27 From a letter dated 20 March 1955 from the Guardian's Assistant Secretary, Leroy Ioas, to the American National Spiritual Assembly, and forwarded to the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly. *Messages to Canada*, p.218.

16 *Canadian Bahá'í News*, April 1957, p.3.

17 Minutes of the Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee, 16 December 1953.

18 Cable from Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 19 March 1954. *Messages to Canada*, p. 192.

19 P. Pemberton-Pigott, Secretary, Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee of the Bahá'ís of Canada to "all Real Estate agents in the Metropolitan Area", 17 May 1954.

20 In a memorandum from Ed Muttart, dated November 1969, he reports that Committee members were "laughed at" for proposing these criteria.

21 Annual Report of the Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee, 27 March 1955.

On 1 May 1955, Shoghi Effendi cabled “Urge entire community exert supreme effort ... purchase land Temple Hazíra.” His concern was further conveyed in a letter dated 16 July 1955: “He is extremely anxious to have these properties purchased, either together in one place, or if this is not feasible, then in two separate places, as he has already informed you...No doubt the problem is more difficult for you to solve, owing to special conditions in Toronto and vicinity; but we know that all problems are solvable for the Bahá’ís, with the power of God to help them; and he is eagerly awaiting news of your success.” In the postscript of the letter, Shoghi Effendi wrote “The purchase of the site of the Mother Temple of the Dominion of Canada and the establishment of the national Ḥazírátú’l-Quds constitute a double task that can brook no further delay...”²⁸

By September 1955, while the Hazira property at 539 Mount Pleasant had been secured for the time, the National Assembly’s offers to the Ontario government for the Woodbine property were ultimately refused. In the meantime, new Committee members were appointed, and the search expanded.²⁹ Two other potential properties were identified: a property of some 12 acres at Bayview and Cummer Avenues, and another one on North Bathurst. The National Assembly initially authorized the purchase of approximately seven acres at Bayview and Cummer.³⁰ By December 1956 the National Spiritual Assembly reported to the Guardian that they had offered to purchase four acres from the Petrofina Company, contingent on approval for re-zoning by the North York Township council, and then for approval by the Metropolitan Council.

However, purchase of the site at Bayview and Cummer was chronically delayed as the local Planning Board was still determining the location of a major road. The re-zoning process was taking so long that by May 1957, the National Spiritual Assembly reported giving up hope of obtaining the property.³¹ During this same month, the National Assembly appointed a group of friends to search for a possible Temple site in Ottawa.³² In the 18 July 1957 letter from the Guardian, his secretary wrote:

It is a pity that the Canadian believers are having so much difficulty settling the question of both their Temple land and their National Headquarters. He was very surprised and distressed to learn that the Temple site you had chosen has entirely fallen through, and that you have to begin all over again looking for a Temple site. He feels that your Assembly should appreciate the fact that the important thing at this time is to acquire a Temple site. It does not have to be a very large piece of land, and, if the worst comes to the

worst, at a future date, when the time comes to build a Temple in Canada, it can be exchanged or sold and a better site procured; but the question for this present National Body to settle once and for all is the purchase of a Temple plot as a beginning in order to remove from the Ten Year Plan one of its most important goals, and one the accomplishment of which has been dragging too long. He feels that your Assembly should also look around for a suitable and permanent Ḥazírátú’l-Quds in Toronto, and try and dispose of the one you have without loss, if possible, in order to enable you to acquire the new and he hopes permanent one at once.

To this, Shoghi Effendi added:

The setbacks and difficulties that have, unexpectedly and most unfortunately, been recently experienced in connection with the acquisition of both the national Ḥazírátú’l-Quds and the site of the future Mother Temple of Canada, must be faced with resolution and vigour, and a definite and permanent solution be found which will ensure the full attainment of these twofold primary objectives.³³

After a protracted period of negotiations and rezoning, the Bayview and Cummer property was at last purchased in March 1958, four months after the Guardian’s untimely passing. The Temple site was dedicated in a gathering on 26 April 1958 by Hand of the Cause of God Mr. John Robarts.³⁴

The site, which cost \$22,500, was afforded by funds left to the National Assembly by Hand of the Cause of God Mr. Siegfried Schopfloch, whom the Guardian referred to as the “Chief Temple Builder” because of his devotion to the cause of completing the Mother Temple of the West in Wilmette, Illinois.³⁵ It was the Guardian’s request that a bequest Mr. Schopfloch left the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly be used toward the Mother Temple of Canada.³⁶

An unexpected turn of events

For a time, the issue of properties seemed settled as the Canadian community could rest assured that a paramount objective of the Ten Year Crusade was at last fulfilled. However, over time the National Assembly grew concerned that the Temple site at Bayview and Cummer was in the centre of a major development underway at the time. It was becoming somewhat challenging to imagine a Bahá’í House of Worship in what was now a residential area. Besides the houses that surrounded the property, a shopping plaza and two apartment buildings were installed immediately across the road to the south.³⁷

28 Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to the National Spiritual Assembly, 16 July 1955, *Messages to Canada*, p. 225.

29 National Spiritual Assembly to Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee, 1 September 1955.

30 National Spiritual Assembly to Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee, 5 October 1955

31 National Spiritual Assembly to Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, 15 May 1957.

32 National Spiritual Assembly to a group of friends, 15 May 1957.

33 Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to National Spiritual Assembly, 18 July 1957. *Messages to Canada*, pp. 262–266.

34 *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 101, June 1958, p.1

35 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada to Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, 22 April 1953; 11 October 1954.

36 Cable from Shoghi Effendi Rabbani to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 29 October 1954.

37 *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 224, November 1968, p.1.



15 Lola Road in Toronto, Ont., which served as the Bahá'í National Centre from 1957 to 1969, pictured in 1963.

Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

Around seven years³⁸ after the Bayview and Cummer purchase, a real estate agent met with the Secretary of the National Assembly at the time, Mr. Douglas Martin, and offered \$75,000 for the four acres of land there. Considering the great difficulty experienced in acquiring this land, and that the National Assembly now had international financial goals, Mr. Martin described the situation to the agent and politely declined, thinking that he couldn't dare put this topic on the agenda of the National Spiritual Assembly.

The agent returned to the Bahá'ís, each time increasing his offers: first \$115,000, and then \$150,000, to no avail. In the meantime, it was discovered that the development surrounding the Temple land at Bayview and Cummer had violated zoning by-laws, as it was supposed to include an institutional building—like a school or retirement home—in the same area, but it had been filled with houses. The developer needed the land for this purpose. When the offer was raised to \$225,000, “the reply given to the enquiries was that the property was not for sale, since we could not be without a temple site at any time.”

³⁸ *Canadian Bahá'í News*, issue 224, November 1968, reports the process beginning “during the past two or three years.”

Finally, in the spring of this year, a proposal was made that the Bahá'ís sell the land and purchase another site simultaneously.³⁹

Mr. Wertheim, the real estate agent who had approached the National Spiritual Assembly, was representing Guildwood Villa, a nursing home company, in the potential purchase of the site. An offer of \$225,000 was on the table. However, there was an issue with the re-zoning of the property, an issue that was unlikely to be finalized until March 1969, according to the committee and consultants assisting the National Spiritual Assembly in this transaction. The buyers were uncertain about purchasing the property before the city could confirm the re-zoning.

There are two accounts about the finding of the current property, where the National Ḥaẓiratu'l-Quds now stands, and which is the site of the future Mother Temple of Canada. According to a memorandum⁴⁰ recording the story by Craig Weaver, he and Allan Raynor, two

³⁹ Much of this account is from a recorded interview with Mr. Douglas Martin from June 2014, and in *Canadian Bahá'í News*, issue 224, November 1968.

⁴⁰ National Spiritual Assembly Treasurer Ed Muttart, memo to file, November 1979.



A meeting of the National Teaching Committee in the log house in Markham, Ont. in 1972. Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

members of the Hazíra and Temple Grounds Committee, were driving around the northern edge of Toronto, and after looking at several suggested properties they deemed unsuitable, decided to drive further north on Leslie Street, past Steeles Avenue. It was here that one of the men spotted the mailbox of Dr. Herbert Pugsley, whom he had known for 20 years, and they decided to drop in to say hello. Former National Spiritual Assembly members also recall Mr. Wertheim, the real estate agent representing the buyer of the Cummer Avenue site, was aware that Dr. Pugsley would be selling the property, and that he helped facilitate the introduction. While the details have not been completely uncovered to date, it seems that both connections may have been at play.

In the account of Craig Weaver and Allan Raynor, in the course of their first conversation with Dr. Pugsley, they discovered that his property, including his log cabin home, was for sale, as he was planning to retire. After the two men shared that they were, in fact, looking for a property, Dr. Pugsley inquired about the Bahá'í Faith and they gave him a copy of the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, by John Esslemont. He also showed the two men around his property, located in a beautiful natural setting with many trees, and indicated that it was his wish to sell his land to an organization that would look after it.

Suffice to say, it seemed perfect for the needs of the Bahá'ís, and a concerted effort was made to purchase the property. The relationship continued with Dr. Pugsley, and an interesting minute from October 1968, from the Committee responsible for acquiring the property, refers to two other offers, “both higher than ours...”

Through a carefully coordinated plan to have the sale of the Cummer property and the purchase of the Pugsley property occur on the same day, the National Spiritual Assembly acquired the 16.6-acre property on 15 October 1968, for a total of \$290,000. *Canadian Bahá'í News* reported: “An extremely favourable offer was received for our Cummer-Bayview property, and our offer for the new property was accepted, both of them to be concluded simultaneously on October 15th. These negotiations were



Hand of the Cause John Roberts speaks at the dedication of the current Bahá'í National Centre in April 1974. Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

completed by the National Assembly on October 12th.” Further, “The present National Office will be put on the market without delay and it is expected that the move into the new location will be made on February 15, 1969.”⁴¹

The Bayview and Cummer property sold for \$215,000—some nine times what had been paid 10 years earlier.⁴² The balance of the purchase price of the Pugsley property was made up through contributions and loans from the friends. The log house was initially utilized as the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds (1969-1974) until a larger one could be constructed.

As part of the sale agreement, the Pugsleys continued to occupy the house until 15 February 1969.⁴³ After the purchase was complete, Dr. Pugsley wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly, providing further valuable information regarding the history of the property and their stewardship of the land.⁴⁴ Dr. Pugsley and his wife had found the property after a protracted period of searching. They wanted a place that had the feel of the country yet was near the city for his work. After at least six months of searching almost every weekend, they had come across the site by chance, after driving further north than planned on Leslie Street. Immediately, they knew this was their “dream site.” The farmer who owned it, as part of his 75-acre farm, was quite attached to these 10 acres, but the Pugsleys eventually managed to convince him to sell it to them.

Dr. Pugsley and his wife oversaw the construction of the log house. It is made up of two dismantled older cedar log cabins and was completed in June 1946. Later, the dining room was added, built of clapboards, as well as a three-car garage, built from dismantled barns.

In his letter, Dr. Pugsley explained that while there were many beautiful trees pre-existing on the property,

41 *Canadian Bahá'í News* issue, 224, November 1968, p.1.

42 Because a rezoning application to permit a change of use by the buyer, Guildwood Villa, was not able to be secured by the 15 October 1968 date, it was necessary to reduce the selling price by \$10,000 to expedite the sale and secure the Pugsley property.

43 Papers of Allan Raynor, Canadian Bahá'í Archives.

44 Herbert Pugsley to the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 30 June, 4 July and 15 July 1969.

particularly white pine, hemlock and maple, they had several thousand seedlings planted during the first few years of their ownership, mostly red pines and spruce, as well as birch trees. All the current trees of this variety were planted as seedlings between 1945 to about 1950. Their foresight led to the many mature trees existing today.

In its reply to Dr. Pugsley in July 1969, the National Assembly wrote, “We feel very much indebted, in a way in which it would be impossible to either express or repay, to you and Mrs. Pugsley for preserving this uniquely beautiful tract of land and for erecting so singularly appropriate a house upon it. Had we consciously sought for a building which would be suitable for the centre of the Bahá’í Faith in Canada, we would probably never have conceived of one so eminently suited for the purpose.”⁴⁵

The Pugsleys had made efforts to ensure that surrounding developments did not encroach on the property, a legacy that was continued by the National Spiritual Assembly. When a sand pit⁴⁶ operation began north of their home, the Pugsleys bought a strip of land 200 feet wide along the entire north boundary of the property to prevent it from expanding close to their home. Additionally, they purchased about 5.5 acres of land south of the lane, and a strip of land 65 feet wide along the west boundary to further ensure privacy. About two of the 5.5 acres were later sold to a neighbour, resulting in approximately three acres to the south of the lane being part of the Bahá’í purchase. Around six years after the National Spiritual Assembly purchased the original 16.6 acres, another 4.1 acres of land was purchased from Mr. Sabiston to the north of the property.⁴⁷

Developments regarding the current property

In the background of the seemingly miraculous circumstances around acquiring the final property for the National Ḥazíratu’l-Quds and Mashriqu’l-Adhkár was an upswing in teaching the Faith in Canada, a spiritual act which draws confirmations. This was encouraged by a series of visits from Hands of the Cause of God from around 1960-70, each undoubtedly inspiring the community to greater heights.

During the five years when the log cabin at 7290 Leslie Street was operating as the Canadian National Ḥazíratu’l-Quds, the teaching work, the coordination of which was assisted by an appointed National Teaching Committee, expanded even further. Other committees, reflecting national goals at the time, included the Pioneering Committee, the Proclamation Committee, and two Assembly Consolidation Committees, for Eastern and Western Canada. As needs at the national level expanded beyond the departments of the Secretariat and Treasury, it was clear that a larger National Centre was required.⁴⁸

45 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada to Dr. Herbert E. Pugsley, 28 July 1969.

46 Mining to extract sand.

47 Minute #131-41 noted approval to purchase 4.1 acres, 11 July 1974.

48 *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 233, September-October 1969, p. 7.

The original plan for construction of the current National Ḥazíratu’l-Quds was to erect a fairly simple concrete block structure. Following the receipt of a letter from the Universal House of Justice that endorsed the basic proposal and which encouraged the building of a structure that was “befittingly attractive,”⁴⁹ the National Spiritual Assembly hired an award-winning firm of Canadian-based architects, Fairfield and Dubois,⁵⁰ to design a building that would take advantage of the beautiful natural setting that the property provides. Funds were raised through a special building fund, loans from believers and the reserve fund of the National Assembly.⁵¹

Construction began in summer 1973.⁵² The Bahá’í National Centre was dedicated on 28 April 1974 during the National Convention, in the presence of all delegates and guests, and became operational later that year.⁵³ In 1986, a Bahá’í landscape architect designed the gardens which now beautify the surroundings, and over the following few years, most of the plants and shrubs, which were largely donated, were planted. Efforts to beautify the grounds and interior of the building have continued over the years.

After the upheavals and major developments of the past, the last 50 years have seen relative quiet in the Hazíra. There were some overhauls of furnishings, the installation of a subfloor in the early 1990s to accommodate electrical needs, as well as the leasing of offsite space for additional storage of the National Assembly’s archives. In 2006, the property that includes what is now the Don Valley Educational Centre⁵⁴ was purchased, expanding the property size to 40 acres.

Presently, the National Spiritual Assembly has been considering the growing needs of the Bahá’í community of Canada—particularly since the emergence of the training institute, which is unlocking human potential on a large scale—in relation to the Bahá’í National Centre. And, of course, despite the process being initiated 70 years ago, it was not known when conditions would be favourable for a House of Worship to be constructed. Of course, this was a period of rapid transformation for the Canadian Bahá’í community, as a growing army of friends arose as protagonists in the community-building process.

Then, in its recent Ridván message, the Universal House of Justice called for “a national House of Worship to be raised up in Canada, in the vicinity of the long-established National Ḥazíratu’l-Quds in Toronto.” What a blessing then, for us, to be able to respond to this call and continue this legacy today.

49 This letter was dated 14 May 1972.

50 This was an American firm that had come to Toronto while competing on the design for City Hall. They failed to obtain the contract, but liked Toronto so they stayed. Source: interview with Husayn Banani (28 August 2023).

51 *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 270, June 1973, p. 6.

52 *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 273, September 1973, p. 2.

53 Staff moved into the Bahá’í National Centre at 7200 Leslie Street on 15 August 1974. Source: *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 278, May 1974, p. 8; *Canadian Bahá’í News*, issue 280, September-October 1974, p. 1.

54 This building, previously used by the Adventure Valley Day Camp, is now an educational facility used for Bahá’í institute programs.

The story of Aḥmad from Yazd

Aḥmad of Yazd was the recipient of the Tablet of Aḥmad, a prayer the Guardian characterized as being "invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a special potency and significance..." After receiving the Tablet, Aḥmad travelled throughout Persia, visiting the homes of Bábí's with news of "Him Whom God shall make manifest."

The following contains excerpts from *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* Vol. 2, by Adib Taherzadeh (George Ronald) and "The Story of the Tablet of Aḥmad" by Abu'l-Qasim Faizi, in *Conqueror of Hearts* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust of India).

The *Lawh-i-Aḥmad* (Tablet of Aḥmad) is one of the best known Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh...It was revealed around 1282 A.H. (1865) in honour of Aḥmad, a native of Yazd. ...An account of his life is recorded in the annals of the Faith prepared by the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqábád. According to this account he lived to be one hundred and died in the year 1320 A.H. (1902).

Aḥmad was born into a rich and influential family in Yazd. From his early days, when he was still in his teens, he felt a great attraction towards mysticism. At that age he often secluded himself in a room in order to commune with God. His greatest hope in life was to come face to face with the promised Qá'im (Promised One of Islám). He listened to any person who would show him the way, and often sat at the feet of ascetics and dervishes who claimed to possess the divine light within them...¹

Pretending that he was going to the public bath, one morning Aḥmad took a bundle of clothes and disappeared. He travelled towards the south until he reached India where he hoped he might find a clue leading him to his Beloved. This was possibly around 1242 A.H. (1826), some twenty years before the Declaration of the Báb...²

Aḥmad has said that throughout these journeys he came in contact with many mystics, Şúffis and other leaders of thought. But he became disappointed and disillusioned. In spite of imposing upon himself a rigorous self-discipline, and carrying out many prayerful exercises



Aḥmad of Yazd. Photo : Bahá'í Chronicles

such as prostrating himself and repeating a certain verse of the *Qur'án* twelve thousand times, he did not find the object of his quest in India.

Dismayed and disheartened, he retraced his steps to Persia. He made his home in Káshán where he married and worked as a hand-weaver. The following is an extract from his spoken chronicle to some believers.³

Some time passed, and the news of the Báb from Shíráz reached many areas including Káshán. A strong urge was created in me to investigate this message. I made enquiries through every channel, until one day I met a traveller in the caravanserai. When I enquired of him, he said, 'If you are a seeker of truth proceed to Mashhad where you may visit a certain Mullá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq-i-Yazdí who can help you in your investigations.'

After hearing this, I set off on my journey early next day. I walked all the way to Tihrán and from there to Mashhad. However, upon arrival I became ill and had to convalesce for two months in that city. On recovering, I called at the home of Mullá 'Abdu'l-Kháliq and informed the servant that I wished to meet his master. I met the Mullá and acquainted him with my quest. On hearing this, he became very angry with me and threw me out. However, I called again the next day, cried aloud and implored him to guide me. When he saw I was earnest and steadfast in my search for the truth, he then told me to meet him that night in the mosque of Gawhar-Shád where he would put me

1 *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2 pp. 107-8.

2 *Ibid*, p. 108.

3 *Ibid*, p. 109.

in touch with someone who could tell me the whole truth...⁴

After attending a few meetings I was enabled to recognize and acknowledge the truth of the Message of the Báb. Afterwards, Múllá Şádiq instructed me to return to my wife and family in Káshán and resume my work...Thereupon I returned to Káshán and soon discovered that Hájí Mírzá Jání of Káshán was also a believer. The two of us were the only Bábís in that city.⁵

One day, Hájí Mírzá Jání went to Aḥmad and with great enthusiasm and uncontrollable excitement asked him, "Would you like to visit the countenance of Your Lord?" Aḥmad's heart leapt up. With much joy and ecstasy he immediately got up from his seat and asked, "How and when?" Hájí explained to him how he had arranged with the guards to have the Báb in his house as a guest for two or three nights. Therefore at the appointed hour Aḥmad went to Hájí's house. When he entered, his eyes fell on a face the beauty of which surpassed heaven and earth. A young Siyyid was sitting with such meekness, grandeur and majesty that one could not help but behold the light of God in His countenance. Some of the divines and dignitaries of the town were seated on the floor around and the servants stood at the door.

One of the Múllás faced the Báb and said, "We have heard that a certain young man in Shíráz has claimed to be the Báb. Is it true?" "Yes," answered the Báb. "And does he reveal verses, too?" asked the same man. The Báb responded, "And We reveal verses, too."

Aḥmad has further said, "This clear, and courageous answer was sufficient for anyone who had ears to hear and eyes to see and find the whole truth immediately. His beautiful face and His powerful Words and presence sufficed all things. But when they served tea and a cup was offered to the Báb, He immediately took it, called the servant of the same Múllá and very graciously gave it to him. The day after, the very same humble servant came to me and with great sorrow deplored the stupidity of his master. A little explanation as to the station of the Báb brought him to our fold and our number grew to be three."

This small nucleus started to grow and the number of the adherents increased. This angered the divines who used all their cunning to stop the flow of the already powerful stream of life. They instigated the cruel ignorant mob to plunder, confiscate and kill all those who bore the name of the Báb. Every day they would go to a house, so enraged that they would break its doors and windows, destroy the building and plunder and loot the contents. In the evening one would find the bodies of people dead in the streets and lanes and even scattered over neighbouring mountain and plains. This continued and Aḥmad's house was no exception. Aḥmad then had to hide in a tower

4 In those days, the believers were very careful not to disclose their Faith indiscriminately to the public. They taught the Faith only to those who were truly sincere.

5 Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, George Ronald, 2006. pp. 110.

for forty days and the friends used to take him food and provisions.⁶

Aḥmad continues his story...

Since it became difficult to live in Káshán, I set off for Baghdád. It was about five years since Bahá'u'lláh had taken up residence in that city...On our arrival in Baghdád, I walked in the direction of the house of Bahá'u'lláh...

After being admitted to the house of Bahá'u'lláh, I attained His presence. He turned to me and said 'What a man! He becomes a Bábí and then goes and hides in the wind tower!' I remained in Baghdád for six years and worked as a hand-weaver. During this period my soul was bountifully nourished from His glorious presence, and I had the great honour to live in the outer apartment of His blessed house...⁷

However, I was basking in the sunshine of Bahá'u'lláh's presence until the Sultán's decree for Bahá'u'lláh's departure to Constantinople was communicated. It was thirty-one days after Naw-Rúz that the Blessed Beauty went to the Garden of Najíb Páshá. On that day the river overflowed and they had to open the lock gates to ease the situation. On the ninth day the flooding subsided and Bahá'u'lláh's family left the house in Baghdád and went to the Garden. Immediately after their crossing, however, the river began to swell again and the lock gates had to be re-opened. On the twelfth day Bahá'u'lláh left for Constantinople. Some of the believers accompanied Him and some including this servant had to remain in Baghdád. At the time of His departure, all of us were together in the Garden. Those who were to remain behind were standing on one side. His blessed Person came to us and spoke words of consolation to us. He said that it was better that we remain behind. He also said that He had allowed some to accompany Him, merely to prevent them from making mischief and creating trouble.

One of the friends recited the following poem of Sa'dí in a voice filled with emotion and deep sorrow:

'Let us shed tears as clouds pour down in the spring;
Even the stones wail when lovers part.'

Bahá'u'lláh responded, 'These words were truly meant for today.'⁸

...After Bahá'u'lláh's departure for Constantinople, Aḥmad remained in Baghdád and served the Faith in that city with great devotion. However, in his heart he was longing to attain the presence of his Lord again. After some time, he could no longer bear to stay away and so he set off for Adrianople. When he arrived in Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh sent him a Tablet which is now universally known as the *Tablet of Aḥmad*. On

6 Faizi, Abdu'l-Qasim. "The Story of the Tablet of Aḥmad" published in *Conqueror of Hearts*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust of India, 1973.

7 Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, George Ronald, 2006. p. 111-112.

8 Ibid, p. 112.

Aḥmad travelled extensively throughout Persia and gave the glad-tidings of the coming of ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’ to many of the Bábís.

reading this Tablet, Aḥmad knew what was expected of him. He surrendered his own will to Bahá’u’lláh’s and instead of completing his journey to Adrianople and attaining the presence of His Lord, he returned to Persia with the sole purpose of teaching and propagating the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to the Bábí community.⁹

Following the example of Muníb and Nabil-i-A’zam who were sent by Bahá’u’lláh to teach His Cause, Aḥmad travelled extensively throughout Persia and gave the glad-tidings of the coming of ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’ to many of the Bábís. Through his dedicated efforts a great many recognized the station of Bahá’u’lláh and became his ardent followers. The Bábí community at that time was in such a state of deprivation and perversity that sometimes the Bábís showed hostility towards Bahá’í teachers. In his spoken chronicle Aḥmad has recounted one such incident in *Khurásán*. He says:

I left Tihrán for *Khurásán* and spoke to many concerning the advent of ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’. I went to the town of Furúgh (Province of *Khurásán*) in the garb of a dervish, and spoke about ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’ to Mullá Mírzá Muḥammad and his brothers. In the course of our discussions they became aggressive and fiercely assaulted me. In the struggle which ensued they broke my tooth. When the fighting had stopped and emotions subsided, I resumed the discussion, saying that the Báb had specifically mentioned that ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’ would appear by the name of Bahá. They promised to accept the claims of Bahá’u’lláh should I be able to verify my statement. I asked them to bring the Writings of the Báb to me. They made an opening in the wall and took out all the Writings which were hidden for fear of the enemy. As soon as I opened one of them, we found a passage which indicated that ‘He Whom God shall make manifest’ would bear the name of Bahá. They happily embraced the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and I left them and travelled to other towns.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that these brothers in Furúgh became outstanding Bahá’ís, especially Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Furúghí, the son of Mullá Mírzá Muhammad. He was an heroic soul, an embodiment of faith and courage, and the indefatigable defender of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh.

Concerning Aḥmad in his latter days, Hájí Muḥammad-Táhir-i-Málmíri has written the following:

For some time Aḥmad lived, worked and taught the Faith in *Káshán*. The Tablet of Aḥmad (Arabic) was revealed in his honour and he used to carry with him the original Tablet which is in the handwriting of the Blessed Beauty. However, his wife died in *Káshán*... Soon after this he went to *Shiráz* and then to *Nayríz* where he married again and lived in that area for about twenty years...He was a very simple man, pure and truthful...He spent most of his time in reading the Holy Writings, especially his own Tablet which he chanted very often.¹¹

The years passed by full of eventful days, but when the waves of persecution spread all over Persia, the friends in their love and admiration for Aḥmad endeavoured to protect him against fatal attacks and after long consultations, they suggested to him that he immediately leave that forlorn and forsaken corner of the country for a more populated centre...After changing places of residence many times, he settled in *Tihrán*. He never wavered, nor was he ever anything but that “flame of fire” and “river of life eternal.” After having lived one century, always enjoying good health, he passed on to the presence of his Beloved in 1905 in *Tihrán*...

Towards the end of his life, Aḥmad entrusted the original Tablet to [his grandson] Jamal who in turn, out of the purity of his heart and his devotion to the Faith of God offered it as a gift to Hand of the Cause, Trustee of *Huqúq*, the son and brother of two illustrious martyrs, *Jinab-i-Valiyu’lláh Varqá*. When *Jinab-i-Varqá*, according to the instructions of the beloved Guardian, attended the opening ceremony of the Temple in *Wilmette*...he brought this most precious Tablet as his offering to the archives of the Bahá’ís of the United States.¹²

The *Tablet of Aḥmad* is endowed with a special potency, and for this reason the believers often recite it at times of difficulty or trouble. Although a short Tablet, it contains all the verities of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and may be regarded as a charter setting out the requirements of faith and servitude for the individual.¹³

– *Selections compiled by Alaeddin Alizadeh*

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 115.

¹² Faizi, Abdu’l-Qasim. “The Story of the Tablet of Aḥmad” published in *Conqueror of Hearts*, Bahá’í Publishing Trust of India, 1973.

¹³ Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. 2, George Ronald, 2006. p. 116.

⁹ Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. 2, George Ronald, 2006. p. 113.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 114-15.



Tutors home visit a youth who is part of a study circle in Sudbury, Ont. Photo: Kalila Michelle Hamilton-Bachiu

Home visits build culture and community

In various contexts across Canada, friends are learning about what it means to carry out systematic home visits and begin to effect social transformation.

Toronto, Ontario

In midtown Toronto, Nancy Minden and David Honsberger recently moved to a new unit in their condo building. Since their move, the couple has tried various approaches to engaging in uplifting conversations with their neighbours. These efforts were stimulated by the study of *Ruhi Book 2: Arising to Serve*, with participants supporting each other's service.

The "A Few Thoughts for the Tutor" introduction in *Ruhi Book 2* states: "The practice of visiting homes for

the explicit purpose of exploring themes of spiritual and social significance clearly enriches the culture of a community. Equally crucial in this respect are the many informal discussions that occur at home and in the workplace, at school and in the market. To introduce spiritual principles into everyday conversation from time to time, then, is an ability that deserves attention."

Ms. Minden has taken the initiative to engage in multiple initial conversations as she sees her neighbours in elevators, hallways, and the

lobby. These simple, yet consistent, conversations "build readiness for making a deeper connection with somebody," she explains, and have led to some regular home visits and gatherings with several families on the couple's floor.

She recently asked two neighbours if they wanted to bring their dinner to her home for the three of them to eat together. "They walked out their door with their food, and down the hall. It was like being in a dorm, a residence," she says. Although they brought their own meals, Ms. Minden was still mindful of being



A junior youth group visits a parent of one of the children in a children's class in Sudbury, Ont.

Photo: Chandyn Hamilton-Bachiu

a hospitable host and placed a few things on the table for them to share. Afterward, they decided to make the dinners a monthly pattern.

A dinner gathering in the building's party room, which began a few months ago, has been continuing regularly once a month and brings together families from the couple's floor. The goal for this gathering has been for neighbours to get to know each other better, and for all, especially neighbours with special needs—many of whom are in their advanced years—to feel comfortable in reaching out to one another in times of need.

The initiative began when on multiple occasions over several months, Ms. Minden mentioned to one neighbour the idea that it would be nice to get to know one another as the couple had recently moved to the floor. She also introduced the concept of community building into the conversation every time they passed one another in the halls and elevators. "By the time we went to dinner, the seed had been planted," she comments. The conversation carried from one neighbour to another, as more neighbours took ownership over the planning process.

With regard to their approach to conversations, Ms. Minden explains, "I think a home visit is how a soul connects in an intimate way about meaningful things; it implies humble curiosity as well as a transparency in me." The couple strives to create a balance between approaching a conversation with humble curiosity and seizing opportunities to introduce concepts from Ruhi Book 2 to elevate their discussions.

Part of the humility in their approach includes exercising the principle of reciprocity. Neighbours will often offer to host a visit at their own homes after the couple has hosted them. "If somebody wishes to host us at their home, I think it's really important to pursue that," commented Mr. Honsberger. These reciprocal home visits can be seen as the first stirrings of a change in culture of their community.

Sudbury, Ont.

The introduction of Book 2 continues its description of the types of conversations undertaken during home visits: "The practice of visiting homes...has shown itself to be essential not only for the purpose of propagating knowledge of the Faith; it is also imperative to the successful

unfoldment of the programs for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth and for the spiritual education of children...regular visits need to be undertaken by animators and teachers to the parents of youngsters in the two programs to discuss the concepts and approaches which give them shape."

In the Flour Mill neighbourhood in Sudbury, Ont., a strong youth movement emerged in 2020. Since then, about four cohorts of youth have entered the institute, with the first cohort of youth having studied up to Ruhi Book 4. There are also five junior youth groups and two children's classes in the neighbourhood, with some of these youth serving as animators and children's class teachers.

In June 2022, a group of tutors from the neighbourhood, including Kalila Hamilton-Bachiu, who is currently serving as the institute coordinator, attended a Book 1 and Book 2 institute seminar organized by the institute board of Ontario and held at the Bethany Bahá'í Centre of Learning, outside Toronto, Ont. These seminars focused on high-quality tutoring and accompanying participants in carrying out the practice components of these books.

On returning to their neighbourhood, the tutors applied these lessons in tutoring Books 1 and 2 with a group of local youth offering a summer of service. “We set goals around the quality of tutoring, placing emphasis around the habits and practices, so sharing prayers for Book 1 and carrying out home visits for Book 2,” Ms. Hamilton-Bachiu explains. They also reflected on their inner condition as tutors and how to embody the qualities of a tutor in the context of home visits. “For example,” Ms. Bachiu shares, “listening and not just having a script. Being detached from results. Having a firm conviction in a set goal—for example, sharing a prayer.” Their pattern of activity during that summer—they met four days per week with the youth—allowed them to study Ruhi Book 2 in the mornings and go out into the neighbourhood in the afternoons to visit parents whose children participate in junior youth groups and children’s classes. This allowed for a continuous flow of study, action, and reflection. The youth prepared a lot beforehand, working to remember the themes and practicing conversations together.

Ms. Hamilton-Bachiu describes how previously the youth felt that certain prejudices were a barrier to carrying out home visits, such as that young people cause trouble, are noisy, and so on. But through carrying out home visits, unity and trust was built among neighbours, and suspicions dissipated. “Through home visits the youth are realizing the vision of the institute as one of building unity,” Ms. Hamilton-Bachiu comments.

After the summer, a regular pattern of carrying out home visits with parents emerged, often naturally as a need was identified. “Sometimes we would notice that participation in study circles and junior youth groups would start to drop, and we would consult as a team and realize that we hadn’t done home visits for a while,” Ms. Hamilton-Bachiu explains. After carrying out home visits, participation would increase

again. “This helped our team realize the systematic need for home visits,” she continues.

During a home visit intensive campaign in the winter, the team also noticed a rise in awareness of home visits in the culture of the neighbourhood. When team members walked around, people on the street would ask if they were carrying out home visits and more youth started to join them on visits. The content of these home visits has also advanced from a conversation about the needs and aspirations of their children, to one inspired by many principles of the Faith. They have been engaging in uplifting conversations around the themes presented in Book 2 and sharing prayers. Now, they are beginning to see parents arising as protagonists in this path of service. For example, after sharing a prayer with a mother, she offered to accompany them to visit more of her friends, assisting them with explaining the concepts.

South Shore, Quebec

Scattered throughout villages in the Chaudière-Appalaches region in Quebec, on the South Shore of the St. Lawrence River, are what Mahalia Gagnon calls a “constellation of beautiful souls” are being engaged in the institute—and home visits have been key to this process. These friends, most of French-Canadian background, have been coming together periodically for family camps, but otherwise are dispersed throughout a relatively large geographic area encompassing several villages.

A few families recently came together for a camp, which took place in Kamouraska, Q.C. They studied Ruhi Book 5: *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth*, while at the same time about 15 children were engaged in their own program. A band of friends from around the province has been coming together to support these activities.

Ms. Gagnon describes how this population has a traumatic past with religion, and affirms that while they

“Home visits are very important, because this is where you prove that you are their friend. Not just for the camp, but all the time.”

are receptive, building trust over a long period of time is important. “Home visits are very important, because this is where you prove that you are their friend. Not just for the camp, but all the time,” she said. She also describes how home visits provide an opportunity for questions to emerge, encourage families to reach out to those around them and are an overall means of “consolidation and protection of the process.”

The education of children is also a topic of great interest to the families and is a theme that has often been explored in the context of home visits. Conversations during both camps and home visits have also drawn on the themes presented in Ruhi Book 2—particularly an exploration of the principles of the Faith like the oneness of humanity, harmony between science and religion, the equality of women and men and the elimination of all forms of prejudice.

Ms. Gagnon describes, “After a while their questions evolve...to more direct questions about the Administrative Order, the Laws of God, the Funds of the Faith, the nature of community life and developing spiritual qualities.” Regarding the dynamics of elevating conversations, Ms. Gagnon says, “You have to know your music notes but be able to jam. Don’t play the same song even if it’s not what they want to hear.”

Now these friends are starting to reach out to their neighbours. One mother invited her friend who



After a Sunday morning children's class, families go bird feeding at a local park in Richmond, B.C. Photo: Ramien Boeve

was investigating spirituality to investigate the Bahá'í Faith over a coffee. They ended up arranging an evening of prayer where they read the Writings and considered the implications in their lives.

Richmond, B.C.

In Richmond, B.C., a pattern of community life is emerging among a group of families, most of whom are newcomers to Canada from China. Betty Dai, who lives and serves in Richmond, explains, "In Chinese culture, we see each other very often. Friends pop in and we say prayers together, have community-building activities, barbecues and arrange playdates with our kids. And when we get together, we always have elevated conversations." These conversations take place in many spaces and over time. Families don't always feel comfortable having each other over, for example if their home is not yet furnished, so they also meet in parks and coffee shops.

The education of children is a primary area of concern. Last year, they had four weeks of children's camps, which proved to be a centre of attraction for families. In China,

Ms. Dai describes, the education system tends to be strict, with long hours dedicated to book learning. The families who have immigrated to Canada tend to be interested in a more balanced approach to education, but find the Canadian system challenging to navigate, with parents unsure of whether their children are learning enough. The children's camp met the need for their children to learn English, with one mother commenting to Ms. Dai that "one month at children's camp helped her child's English better than six months at school."

Life in Canada is often a challenge for these families, who frequently have financial worries in addition to concerns about their children. As these families have embraced the Faith and declared as Bahá'ís, prayers like "O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit," have been a meaningful means of practicing trust in God and focusing on the positive. The sense of community has also been pivotal in terms of the health of these families, with one mother commenting after the children's camp that it was the first time she felt a sense of belonging since entering Canada.

Since last April there have been around eight enrollments, and after the conference there were a few more. The mothers who are studying Ruhi Book 1 have been consistently sending their children to Bahá'í children's classes, with the vision being that they will soon study Ruhi Book 3 and serve as children's class teachers. They have a weekly coffee meeting to support each other, and a junior youth group has also emerged.

When asked how she came to be connected to many families, Ms. Dai gave an example of how opportunities to visit others can present themselves, even in unexpected circumstances. For example, her children had always had a pet fish, but it recently died. They reached out to someone online to purchase more and were given about 30 fish—too many to care for. So, they called up their friends and offered to bring them a fish. When they showed up at one person's house, it was their birthday, so they joined for cake and got to know them better. This led to an invitation to a Ridván celebration, which the whole family attended. "Any conversation can be elevated," Ms. Dai declared.



Delegates return from praying at the Temple site during National Convention.

The 73rd Bahá'í National Convention

Delegates at the National Convention completed their twin duties of electing the National Spiritual Assembly and consulting on the vision before Canada.

The 73rd Bahá'í National Convention, which took place from 19-22 May 2023 at the Toronto Bahá'í Centre, opened in a state of jubilation over the Universal House of Justice's announcement that the time has come for a National House of Worship to be raised up in Canada, "in the vicinity of the long-established National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds in Toronto."¹ It was only last year that the delegates of the National Convention had consulted about

the conditions that would permit such a development—a longing that has now been abundantly fulfilled. Those present included delegates from coast to coast to coast—from St. John's, Nfld, to Comox, B.C., to Iqaluit, Nvt.—the National Spiritual Assembly, members of the Continental Board of Counsellors Mr. Ayafor Ayafor and Dr. Borna Nouredin, special guests Dr. Firaydoun and Mrs. Vida Javaheri, as well as a number of Auxiliary Board members, volunteers and observers.

This year's National Convention was further galvanized by the fact that all nine members of the outgoing National Spiritual Assembly had just returned, invigorated and inspired, from the International Convention in the Holy Land, which took place during the festival of Ridván. They expressed their joy at receiving news of the National Temple in the company of the lovers of Bahá'u'lláh from every corner of the globe, and described the consultations at the international level as demonstrating the reality of a single, unified,

¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2023.



A delegate from Quebec addresses the Convention. Photo: Gregory Vochin

worldwide conversation on how to release the society-building power of the Faith.

Early Saturday morning the delegates visited the nearby Bahá'í National Centre in rotating groups and, as a gentle rain descended on them, stepped into the forested area that is now Canada's Temple Site and prayed under a canopy of trees. During this visit the delegates also had the opportunity to visit the council chamber of the National Spiritual Assembly and peruse a number of relics and objects of spiritual significance to the Faith. One delegate from British Columbia shared that after this visit she had never felt more prepared, more ready to elect the National Spiritual Assembly, despite having served as a delegate for a number of years.

On their return to the Toronto Bahá'í Centre, the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada presented a beautiful letter to the assembled delegates, which spoke to the profound effects of applying this Law to our daily lives: "Considering our wants and needs changes our interactions with society; we begin to consider others' needs before our pleasures, we make moderate choices, we control our lower nature by calling on our spiritual nature ahead of our material needs."²

² From the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to the 2023 National Convention.

The delegates consulted on this year's Ridván message, highlighting several lines, including that "increasing attention needs to be given to other processes that seek to enhance the life of a community—for example, by improving public health, protecting the environment, or drawing more effectively on the power of the arts." The delegates expressed interest in hearing about experience in the realm of social action and public discourse, a thread that continued throughout the consultation.

A delegate from Newfoundland described how his community was learning how to make the arts essential to the activities they do, which led to the engagement of more people. He asked, "Can we use the Temple as a primary example of the beauty that needs to be at the centre of everything?" Others talked about how the arts can help a community to envision the possibilities of the Nine Year Plan. Delegates also sang together at the end of several of the sessions, which was very much in keeping with the spirit of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*.

The consultation then focused on the movement of clusters along a continuum of development, as well as the educational endeavors and the training institute. There was a sense of shared celebration in the progress of clusters across the country: delegates' announcements

that the cluster they reside in had recently reached the next milestone or a certain number of core activities were repeatedly met with applause. In fact, five clusters in Canada reached the third milestone in the week leading up to the Convention.

A delegate from Ontario shared that some clusters in his region had reached the third milestone with a population of around 30-40 Bahá'ís, demonstrating that new paths to progress have emerged and third milestone clusters are not only those with large Bahá'í populations. The Counsellors also encouraged those present to think beyond the third milestone—to see it not as an endpoint, but as an intensification of the process of social transformation already underway.

Many of the comments illustrated how mothers and youth are at the forefront of social transformation in their communities. In his comments, Dr. Nouredin referenced these two populations, saying "Through their efforts, entire families are bringing about practical efforts to transform themselves. The institute is an instrument wielded by them." Indeed, many delegates shared stories of youth and entire families enrolling in the Faith as a natural next step in this process.

Regarding the institute process, Dr. Nouredin shared, "I think we have so much experience with the framework in Canada—this is a strength—that the body of believers in Canada have learned to wield the institute and framework for action. A next frontier for us is to ensure this is in the hands of as many of the 37 million Canadians as possible. What are some of the small and profound shifts that unlock the power of populations?"

On Saturday evening the delegates had the opportunity to view the film "An Expansive Prospect" commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, which through four case studies from around the world—Malaysia, Brazil, the United States and Kenya—captures the efforts of individuals, communities, and



Member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Dr. Borna Nouredin, addresses the Convention. Photo: Nur Elmasri

institutions as they strive to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. One delegate from Ontario commented, “Watching the film helps us reflect on two major concepts: transformation and prevalence.”³ She continued, “How do we communicate this vision in a way that many can move forward?”

The election of the National Spiritual Assembly took place on Sunday morning in a rarified atmosphere of prayer and humility. There was 100 per cent participation in the election from a total of 171 delegates; 157 cast their ballot in person, nine were hand-delivered, and five through e-voting. The members of the National Spiritual Assembly elected for the coming year are: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Hoda Farahmandpour, Gerald Filson, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca and Karen McKye. Outgoing members Deloria Bighorn and Elizabeth Wright were thanked for each serving 14 years on the National Spiritual Assembly. Earlier this year, the National Assembly had accepted their request to relinquish membership on that institution at the time of the Convention.

Indigenous teaching was another thread throughout the consultations, with delegates recognizing that strides had been made over the last year to share learning across

the country, building on existing strengths. This was particularly observed in the National Spiritual Assembly’s annual report, where case studies from localities across the country, each engaging Indigenous populations in the institute process, were shared. In all cases, prayer, the use of the arts, and relating Bahá’í teachings to Indigenous spirituality were important elements in institute activities.

The Convention also had the opportunity to consult on the material means that will be necessary for growth. The National Assembly set out the goal for the Canadian community to raise the funds required for

the Temple and raised its budget by \$5 million as an initial step. The needs of the Deputization Fund were also emphasized, which supports pioneers and institute tutors like youth year of service. Dr. Nouredin shared, “This word ‘deputization’ represents a Law of Bahá’u’lláh. It’s not just a practical way to contribute to the teaching work. When we think of his command to teach every day... in this country it is sometimes difficult, particularly in the way employment is arranged, to find ways to teach daily. Contributing to the Deputization Fund fulfills your obligation to teach the Faith.”

The delegates also discussed how to nurture stirrings of social action at the grassroots, and several friends provided examples of efforts underway. These included study clubs and homework help initiatives, projects to help youth and their parents exercise agency in their use of social media, organizations for English Language learning, and initiatives addressing the mental health of young people.

Several delegates also highlighted the resources available to help us understand fundamental concepts in relation to the areas of social action and public discourse: the



Counsellors and delegates during National Convention. Photo: Gregory Vochin

³ Prevalence refers to when a pattern of community life inspired by the Bahá’í Teachings has reached many in a single geographic area.



Delegates were particularly interested in hearing about social action initiatives at the grassroots. Photo: Nur Elmasri

seminars organized by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, offered to Bahá'í students during their university years, as well as the first units of Ruhi Book 13: *Engaging in Social Action* and Ruhi Book 14: *Participating in Public Discourse*.

Of course, prayer was also a significant component of the Convention, with special prayers offered for the 10 Bahá'í women martyred 40 years

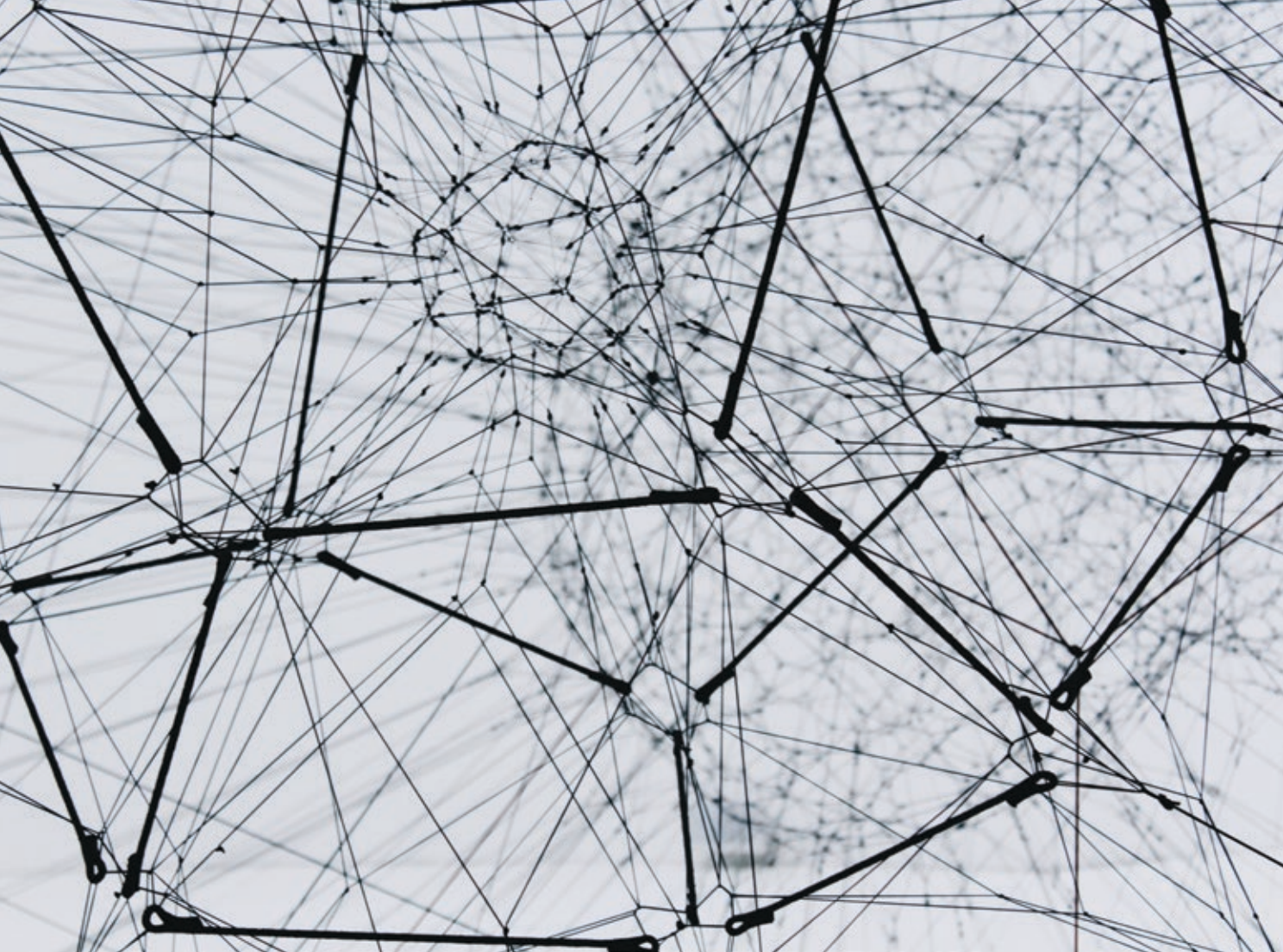
ago in Shiraz, all those Canadian Bahá'ís who had departed from the world this year, as well as a special devotional prepared by the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Ayafor also referenced prayer: "We have been given the bounty of erecting a National House of Worship...What would it look like in neighbourhoods across the country, maybe even a

couple of streets in a neighbourhood, where everyone is praying together and serving together, exemplifying the spirit of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár? What would it take to accomplish this? Can we set our sights on this? When we launch this House of Worship representatives from these neighbourhoods can attend and bring this spirit to the Temple."



Delegates vote on various administrative matters at the beginning of the Convention. Photo: Gregory Vochin



Algo-r-(h)-i-(y)-thms, 2018. Installation view at ON AIR, Tomás Saraceno's solo exhibition at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2018. Photo: Alina Grubnyak

Social forces and home visits

By drawing attention to elements of social theory, an individual outlines how home visits are a powerful means of counteracting forces associated with isolation, fostering meaningful culture and community.

In its message to this year's unit conventions, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada asked communities around the country to reflect on “what is needed to strengthen a culture of home visits where meaningful conversations unfold, ties of spiritual kinship are forged, a sense of community is strengthened, faith is deepened, and plans are made.”¹

¹ From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá'ís of Canada, 6 February 2023.

It noted the isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and asked:

What will it take to overcome the pull of the habits of isolation, developed out of necessity but for the most part no longer required? What elements of current culture—habits of thought and behaviour—may be obstacles to overcome? What elements are strengths to draw on and learn from?²

² Ibid.

The National Spiritual Assembly went on to quote from *Ruhi Book 2: Arising to Serve*, in a passage that highlights that social isolation, however much it was exacerbated by the pandemic, has been with us for some time:

In a world in which powerful forces are tearing communal bonds asunder, the practice of visiting friends and neighbors in their homes to explore themes central

to the life of society can, if it becomes a prominent feature of culture, remedy some of the ills engendered by increasing isolation.³

This message prompted me to reflect on the nature of “culture” in light of my own “habits of thought and behaviour.” I don’t often think of myself in terms of culture—a luxury, or a disadvantage, common to many who are more or less part of the majority culture where they live. But to the extent that I do try to examine my own culture, I can tend to adopt a static view. In particular, my culture—unlike other, more “traditional” cultures from around the world, many of which are represented in communities here in Canada—is not one with a strong practice of people visiting each other. Conversation with strangers tends to be restricted to the barest necessities; ordering food at a restaurant, nodding acknowledgment of someone else’s presence in an elevator. Ties of friendship are circumstantial, and rarely extend outside of the ready-formed social spaces of school and work.

Of course, this is a caricature even of urban North American culture, and probably says more about me than about society. And yet, it does reflect something of social reality, as evidenced by research on loneliness and isolation (which the U.S. Surgeon General, for example, calls an “epidemic”).⁴

For me, the mounting evidence of the deepening problem of isolation in our society shakes up the normalcy of this way of being. This isn’t a matter of some cultures being visiting cultures, and others simply not being that. Something has gone wrong.

Of course, there are aspects of every culture on the planet that need adjusting, and each culture likewise has

positive features that we can learn from. But the discipline, fostered by the institute process, of analyzing the forces operating in society, and their effect on culture—read as habits of thoughts and behaviour—helps move our thinking from a static conception, in which we resign ourselves to being as our culture has shaped us, to a realization of the dynamism and malleability of culture itself.

One tool that I have found helpful in advancing my own thinking about the cultural phenomenon of isolation, and the nature of the social forces that foster it, emerges from the work of Jürgen Habermas, an important philosopher of social theory. Habermas distinguishes between two kinds of spaces people move in, or orientations they adopt, in modern society: “system” and “lifeworld.” System, in a nutshell, encompasses the market and the state; I am operating with a “system” orientation when I do things as varied as ordering a meal through DoorDash or applying for a drivers’ license. Lifeworld, by contrast, describes our “non-institutionalized” way of being amongst friends, family, neighbours, etc. In lifeworld, our discussions with each other—what Habermas calls “communicative action”—are what coordinate our lives. In system, conversely, money and power (in the sense of the state’s ability to direct people’s actions) fulfill this function.

So how does this somewhat arcane terminology help me think about the forces of society that act on me? The crucial insight is this: Habermas argues that in a capitalist, bureaucratic society like ours, the system inevitably colonizes the lifeworld over time: more and more of our lives, that were once spent mostly in a lifeworld orientation, come to look like system instead. As an example, think about how the process of obtaining food for our families has changed over the past 200 years in urban centers—particularly in the West, though these trends tend, with some lag time, to infiltrate the rest of the

world. There was a time when I might have grown much of my food in my own garden, and gotten the rest from my local grocer—someone I knew by name, and who might have been a generational owner of a store, with rich ties to the families that shopped there that straddled the line of business and friendship. At a later time, most of my shopping would have been done at a larger grocery store, employing many workers; and later still, that store would have been acquired by a chain. At this point, the rich lifeworld relationship with the grocer was replaced with the relatively thin social contact of chatting with an employee at check-out. And now, self-checkout has replaced even this for many of us, and we can even order our groceries online, ensuring that we do not need to even see another human being in the process of getting our food.

The point is not that any of these changes were bad in themselves, ill-conceived, or without benefit in convenience and cost. The point instead is that they were driven by forces—capitalist forces, broadly speaking, in the grocery example—and not by deliberate, well-considered choices made by the communities they would impact.

As a consequence of this kind of colonization of lifeworld by system, our space for meaningful community has eroded. This happens gradually, so that we can be blind to the fact that our way of organizing our lives is an anomaly. We may think that this is just the way things are.

So what is the way out? Habermas, who focuses on how large structural forces have driven these changes, isn’t optimistic that they can be reversed, at least not without some kind of catastrophic (and undesirable) collapse of the system. His ideal is a world where people come together to deliberate on an equal footing about what should be done; but this would seem to require a change in culture. If our lifeworld culture wasn’t able to resist colonization by system in the first place, what prospect is there for it to do so now?

3 Ruhi Book 2: *Arising to Serve*, “A Few Thoughts for the Tutor,” p. V.

4 From “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community,” <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

This is where, I think, the path set out for the Bahá'ís and their friends is so radical—radical in the sense of getting to the root of things. The spaces created by the institute process are, in a very real sense, deliberative spaces. People come together, examine their reality—the reality within themselves, and around them—and consult together to raise their collective understanding. Then they perform precisely the kinds of actions that can revitalize the lifeworld, beginning with the home visit which, through this lens, takes on a revolutionary character.

The home visit is, indeed, revolutionary, in the sense of a wheel turning: it helps us reclaim something that has been set aside, if not altogether lost, in our society, and yet moves us forward to a place we have not been before.

And all of this, of course, is infused with the power of the Word of God, which is at the center of the whole enterprise. This is not a power that is easily accommodated by models in social theory, and we may find even many of our friends and acquaintances who yearn for a process to build community skeptical that religion or “spirit” needs to be, or should be, a part of it. To such an audience, for whom bolder claims about the nature of spiritual power do not resonate, I might simply point to the power of motivation that the Word unlocks. Given the inertia created by the forces of society, what could motivate, and sustain the motivation of, a community to swim against the tide? Forming new habits—of thought, or of behaviour—is incredibly difficult, especially given an environment that is designed to sustain our old habits. Yet the institute process has shown a capacity to help individuals and communities do exactly this: create and nurture new habits.

I know that, for my part, these new habits are not yet entrenched. I'll conclude, then, with two thoughts on what might help.

The first is that reflecting on the forces of society, in the way the

institute process helps us to do, is in some sense an exercise in self-compassion. There is, of course, a way of thinking about these forces that can be disempowering: we may come to believe that change is beyond us, because we are the victims of an environment that we did not choose, and that sweeps us along. Yet many of our barriers to change are ultimately in our own minds, and not least of them is a kind of shame that convinces us that we are not worthy of even trying. Yet properly considered, the fact that social forces have, inevitably, shaped who each of us is today is liberating: it does not absolve us from responsibility for who we are, but does at least help us let go of the story that “I simply should be better”—a narrative that can fuel hopelessness and shame, and yet reveals a certain kind of pridefulness, an assumption that one could “simply be better” by some act of will. Instead, we can recognize that the way to become more of what we aspire to be is to adhere to a sound process. An act of sheer will cannot “fix” us, so we are freed from blaming ourselves for our lack of will. If I cannot lift a hundred pounds today, there is nothing for it but committing to a process of strength training, knowing that if I never manage to lift that much, I'll at least reach a point where I can lift more than I can now. If I don't know how to teach a children's class, share a prayer with a friend, or make a home visit, this is not a reflection of my fixed, limited capacity, but a useful indicator of where I should focus my efforts to grow. The institute itself, of course, gives us the tool with which to do so.

The second thought is that, of all the habits we might try to foster, the institute process points us towards perhaps the most fundamental one from the very outset. It is no accident, I am sure, that the very first section of the first unit “Understanding the Bahá'í Writings” of Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* in the institute process asks us to reflect on the Hidden Word: “O Son of Being! Bring thyself to account

each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning...”. This is the habit that helps us take the first step towards growth, by consciously assessing where we are with respect to any other habit we wish to make (or break). As Bahá'u'lláh explains in the first Taráz, “keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision.”⁵ To understand what steps we should take, we must first see where we are standing.

There are a myriad other ways in which the institute process helps with this process of examining our habits of mind and behaviour—our culture—and gradually growing and changing in desirable ways. They are too many to list, let alone explore in any depth, but a few of the more obvious ones include the fact that the institute casts the individual as a protagonist, not a passive recipient of knowledge; the emphasis on learning in action, in which the individual-protagonist engages in simple, progressively advancing, and profound acts of service; and the consultative environment created in the study circle, in which individual insights contribute to collective understanding, and bonds of friendship are developed.

In a society shaped by forces that you and I as individuals played no role in creating, and may feel powerless to quell, choosing to participate in the processes of the institute is a powerful act. It is also, at its core, *creative*—every participant in the institute is playing a part in creating a new culture, and moving their neighbourhood, their community, and ultimately humanity itself towards a society worthy of its growing maturity.

– Michael Sabet

5 From *Tarázát* (Ornaments), *Bahá'u'lláh in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

Mental health workshops focus on youth

In Brampton, Ont. and Montreal, Que., tutors have been addressing challenges with the mental well-being of young people by drawing out key concepts from the institute.

Brampton, Ont.

For over 10 years, friends in the Springdale neighbourhood have been learning how the training institute nurtures a process of community-building amongst all the inhabitants of an area. A culture is slowly strengthening where youth and families consult and take steps towards the spiritual and material advancement of their community together. From the conversations between participants of study circles and junior youth groups, a recognition of the need to support the mental well-being of young people emerged. Youth would seek comfort from their tutors and advice on how to help not only themselves, but their friends who were likewise struggling.

Although not the only solution, the tutors and animators recognized that involvement in the institute process served as a protective factor for many young people in developing mental health resilience. The strong friendships centred around service amongst participants nurtured a spirit of mutual support that made it natural to assist one another in all aspects of life.

Harleen Saggi, a junior youth coordinator in the neighbourhood, comments, “A lot of high school friendships are centered on the self...there is a ‘cut off culture’ where if someone doesn’t benefit you, then you cut them off.” She continues, “the institute helps a group of friends turn towards things that are meaningful—a friendship embedded in service.”

Additionally, the strong sense of meaning and purpose that the Ruhi

Institute fosters in the individual, expressed in the development of one’s spiritual capacities in service to the community, gives a young person a sense of hope that sustains them through struggles. Current mental health literature also supports similar insights.

Inspired by this knowledge, a team of friends, including a practicing physician, developed a series of four workshops that allow these elements of the Ruhi Institute to be more accessible to all. Their effort started during the pandemic: a period of lockdowns and isolation. The aim of the workshops is to build capacity in groups of young people to support their own mental health and well-being as well as that of their friends, family, and community at large. The content follows the story of a group of young people learning to truly accompany one other through challenges. It helps youth to explore the meaning of true friendship, their two-fold moral purpose to contribute to individual and collective transformation, and how accompanying a friend to serve can be a helpful way to support them and to strengthen their own well-being. The material for the youth in grades eight and nine follows the story of a junior youth who is in conflict with one of her friends. Her friend’s older sister helps this junior youth to reconcile the friendship and the two friends carry out acts of service together.

Ms. Saggi describes how the participants of her junior youth group, once they had completed the workshop, immediately went out to invite their friends. “They realized the importance of not leaving someone on their own,” she



Workbooks used for the mental health workshops in the Springdale neighbourhood.

Photo: Martharoot Malungu

said. It was clear that the workshops helped their community gain a deeper understanding of both the educational content and pedagogy of the institute. The workshops also served as an entry point to the institute, since those who finished the course invited their friends to join study circles.

As part of the workshop, the youth are also provided with a list of local resources, including mental health professionals in the community that they can help their friends access in times of need. The series culminates in the planning and execution of a community service project to allow the application of concepts learned in action.

Over the last two years, some 100 youth have participated in the

Radiance workshops, run by 35 facilitators. The workshops have also assisted youth to develop the capacity to invite and engage their friends in a discussion around elevated themes, thus giving impetus to the process of youth entering the institute. Those serving as facilitators also build their capacity as tutors of the institute. The workshops are always refined in light of new insights gained.

Radiance recently took a pause in the neighbourhood while time and energy was directed toward advancing other things. However, an opportunity soon came up to offer it in a high school in the neighbourhood, as part of the Civics and Careers course. More learning is sure to come of this experience.

Montreal, Que.

During the lockdown period of the pandemic, a group of youth in Montreal, Que. also began learning about responding to mental health challenges in their community. They are from the Walkley Avenue neighbourhood and have been meeting regularly since 2017—first as part of a junior youth group and now having entered the institute process together as youth. In this context they regularly carry out acts of service.

During the pandemic, the youth noticed their friends were experiencing heightened feelings of isolation and lethargy resulting from social distancing measures, which included schools moving to online learning. They decided to write a song and share it with their friends to uplift their spirits. After reflecting on this project, they realized that more was needed to help their friends overcome these challenging forces.

They decided to first gain a deeper understanding of the mental health issues that these forces were intensifying among young people. The group began this project without much experience in talking about mental health with their friends and without knowing how to support them in times of need or crisis. They created an interview guide

and practiced asking one another the questions they had prepared. This helped them gain confidence to eventually approach other friends. They wanted to be scientific with their approach and to think deeply about concepts that were arising—such as identity and friendship—as they created their questions. The questions included “What is a true friend?” and “Is an Instagram friend a true friend?”

As they were thinking about their approach to this service project, Mona Ghadirian, a tutor in the neighbourhood and a PhD graduate from the University of McGill, received a request from a colleague at the University to share insights about what youth are facing with regard to mental health, particularly during the pandemic period. Dr. Ghadirian asked that the youth from the group share their insights as well. McGill University then conducted a research project and asked the group to create short videos about mental health challenges they were facing. Months later, a follow-up project was requested to assess their ongoing challenges after the lockdown period of the pandemic had ended.

Following the first McGill project, Dr. Ghadirian presented the group’s experience at a health seminar for the Association for Bahá’í Studies. Through this process, she met a member of the Springdale neighbourhood from Brampton, Ont. and heard about her experience with mental health workshops. Both recognized that similar themes and questions had come up for the two neighbourhoods, particularly concerning friendship and the role of service in bringing meaning to one’s life.

Dr. Ghadirian borrowed the workshop materials developed in the Springdale neighbourhood to take to the youth in Montreal, who “found the conversation so rich,” she notes. One of the youth who has been animating a junior youth group for the past three years wants to try using the material from the Brampton workshops with her own

group because she recognizes the junior youth are facing a lot of the issues addressed in the materials.

From this experience, Dr. Ghadirian shares that the group has learned what it can look like to collaborate with animators and tutors from other clusters in Canada, as well as with research teams in universities and policy makers. “People are grappling with similar questions in various fields. We could have easily done our own thing in our own little corner, but the youth were excited to contribute to the McGill conversation, and they thought it was really cool that their humble thoughts and reflections will be presented to professors and policy makers through that project.”

The group has also learned that it is possible to begin addressing difficult challenges in their communities as young people, and they can gain experience in various fields of learning before graduating university or starting a career. “It was helpful to think of characters like Rose and Musonda [from *Breezes of Confirmation*]. You don’t really need a degree to start thinking about the needs of your community and the needs of your friends,” comments Dr. Ghadirian. “Not to replace the function of healthcare physicians and professionals,” she went on to say, “but I think they were grappling with how they could be of support to their friends that felt really isolated and estranged, and how to give advice in a way that is empowering.”

The participation of youth from these two neighbourhoods in the institute process has given rise to organic growth, social action and contributions to public discourse, as well as greater insight into the training institute as “an instrument of limitless potentialities.” Dr. Ghadirian now hopes to analyze, alongside the Springdale friends, the specific forces of estrangement and lethargy that arise in the community and among individuals, and that influence behaviour in various contexts.



The neighbourhood in which a pioneer family from Canada settled to fulfill an international pioneering goal of the Nine Year Plan, Tartu, Estonia. Photo: Veronica Filson

Arising to pioneer internationally

A family settles in Tartu, Estonia.

The first pioneer family to fulfill one of Canada's international goals for the Nine Year Plan settled in Tartu, Estonia—a Baltic country in Northern Europe—in September 2022. Veronica Filson and Sharuz Moshtael, whose children are three and one years old, were at a time of transition in their lives when they decided to express interest in pioneering in response to the call of the Universal House of Justice. They prayerfully considered their circumstances and capacities, including their experience living and serving in clusters where the activities are embracing large numbers of people.

Pioneering, a distinguished part of the Canadian Bahá'í community's story from its early days, has a renewed focus in the Nine Year Plan. The deployment of teams of international and homefront pioneers has been identified as the "foremost" strategy for achieving one of the Plan's chief objectives: raising in every country and region of the world at least one cluster past the third milestone in its development.¹

¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors: "Foremost among these [strategies] will be the deployment of teams of international and homefront pioneers who are familiar with the framework for action and are prepared to dedicate significant amounts of time and energy to serving the Cause over a number of years."

The Universal House of Justice has so far assigned Canada 14 goal countries for the deployment of international pioneers, each requiring a team of at least two pioneers as early as possible in the first phase of the Nine Year Plan.² In its 7 July 2022 message, the National Spiritual Assembly relayed the goal countries set out by the House of Justice: Belize, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Dominica, Estonia, Greenland, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, the Leeward Islands, Lithuania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

² The first phase is the first four years of the Nine Year Plan.

In the summer of 2022, Ms. Filson and her husband Mr. Moshtael attended a pioneering orientation in Toronto, Ont. At the end of the orientation, they confided to a member of the Pioneering Task Force that they had their bags packed and were ready to go to an international destination—they just didn't know where yet. Soon after, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors was contacted who communicated with the International Teaching Centre and other Counsellors. Through consultation with the pioneer family, Estonia emerged as a destination that matched their personal circumstances and the priorities of the Nine Year Plan.

At the end of the orientation, they confided to a member of the Pioneering Task Force that they had their bags packed and were ready to go to an international destination—they just didn't know where yet.

Having two young children was, of course, a major consideration. It was also during a time when the Russia-Ukraine war was breaking out, with Estonia bordering Russia to the East. When asked about her thoughts at the time, Ms. Filson said, “What makes me more special than those living here?” Currently, her daughter happily attends daycare a few mornings a week and is learning to speak Estonian.



A family that pioneered to Estonia from Canada hands out invitations to a holy day celebration in Winter 2023, Tartu, Estonia. Photo: Veronica Filson

The Tartu Bahá'í community is small, comprised of about 13 adults and under 10 children. Language is one of the most significant barriers, as not everyone speaks English, especially children, but a significant portion of the population learns some English by the time they are youth. This challenge has enabled the pioneer family to focus their efforts on forming a junior youth group, which happened after outreaching to meet neighbours at their door. They did this alongside an Estonian friend, who “loved it and found it exhilarating,” shared Mr. Moshtael. During this past Riđván, a Holy Day celebration was held at the neighbourhood centre, attended by children, junior youth and their parents. Here, they were able to deepen conversations with those with whom they are making a connection.

Another formidable goal of the Plan—establishing or intensifying thousands more programmes of growth across every region—calls for a steady flow of homefront pioneers who can move to neighbourhoods or clusters where help is needed, often within the same region. On the homefront, the Bahá'í Councils of four regions needing outside assistance have informed the National Spiritual Assembly of their priority clusters for receiving pioneers, while the institutions in British Columbia and Ontario are dynamically assessing the needs of their clusters and connecting them with support from their more advanced areas. Specific needs in Northern Canada are also being identified.

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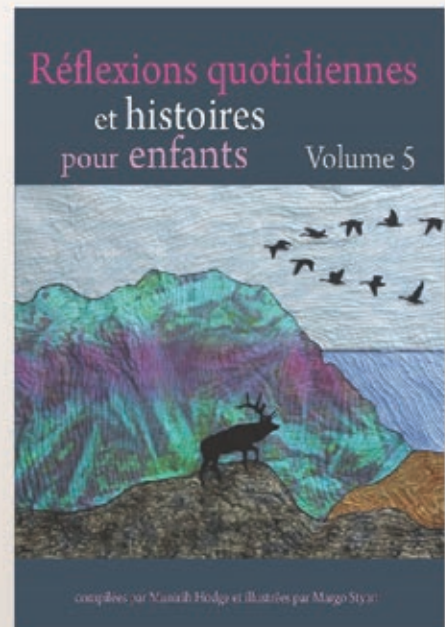


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Membership Portal: Use the online membership portal to update your personal information in the national database, participate in Bahá'í elections and contribute to the Funds of the Faith. Log in or register by visiting the website <https://member.bahai.ca/member/?lang=en>.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

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

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

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

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To travel teach or pioneer within Canada or internationally, contact the Pioneer Desk at pioneer@bahai.ca or 905-889-8168.

To change your address, please notify your Local Spiritual Assembly, Regional Council or the Records Department of the National Spiritual Assembly, providing your name, old address, new address and your Bahá'í ID number to: Records Department, Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8; Phone: 905-889-8168; Fax: 905-889-8184; Email: records@bahai.ca.

To request international credentials from the Bahá'í National Centre when planning to visit countries other than the United States, contact the Records Department: 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8; Phone 905-889-8168; Fax: 905-889-8184; Email: records@bahai.ca.

Pilgrimage requests (nine-day pilgrimage or three-day visit) are to be made directly to the Bahá'í World Centre through the Bahá'í Pilgrimage Website <http://pilgrimage.bahai.org> or by post or fax: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel; Fax: 011-972-4-835-8507.

Getting married? A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place without the authorization of a Local Spiritual Assembly. Please contact, as early as possible, the Local Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will take place. The Records Department at records@bahai.ca can provide you with the necessary contact details.

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

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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

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Payments should be sent directly to the Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury at the Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury will issue one receipt, which will serve both as an acknowledgment receipt and as an official tax receipt. It is up to the individual to determine whether or not she/he wishes to use the receipt when filing her/his income tax return. Cheques, bank drafts, bank and/or postal money orders should be made payable to "Canadian Bahá'í Fund" earmarked "Ḥuqúqu'lláh" or "Right of God." Payments to the Right of God can also be made utilizing the <www.bahai-funds.ca> Online Contribution System. The individual's Bahá'í identification number must be provided on all payments.

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