

BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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Building a haven

From the Writings

And yet, is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestation would be apparent.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 240–1.

Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! Every man of insight confesseth Thy sovereignty and Thy dominion, and every discerning eye perceiveth the greatness of Thy majesty and the compelling power of Thy might. The winds of tests are powerless to hold back them that enjoy near access to Thee from setting their faces towards the horizon of Thy glory, and the tempests of trials must fail to draw away and hinder such as are wholly devoted to Thy will from approaching Thy court.

Methinks, the lamp of Thy love is burning in their hearts, and the light of Thy tenderness is lit within their breasts. Adversities are incapable of estranging them from Thy Cause, and the vicissitudes of fortune can never cause them to stray from Thy pleasure.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 222.

Say: Pride not yourselves on earthly riches ye possess. Reflect upon your end and upon the recompense for your works that hath been ordained in the Book of God, the Exalted, the Mighty. Blessed is the rich man whom earthly possessions have been powerless to hinder from turning unto God, the Lord of all names. Verily he is accounted among the most distinguished of men before God, the Gracious, the All-Knowing.

– Bahá'u'lláh, from the Compilation *Huqúqu'lláh—The Right of God*.

Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective they seem to decrease, but from another they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, #178.

Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 31.

If a man is successful in his business, art, or profession he is thereby enabled to increase his physical well-being and to give his body the amount of ease and comfort in which it delights. All around us today we see how man surrounds himself with every modern convenience and luxury, and denies nothing to the physical and material side of his nature. But, take heed, lest in thinking too earnestly of the things of the body you forget the things of the soul: for material advantages do not elevate the spirit of a man. Perfection in worldly things is a joy to the body of a man but in no wise does it glorify his soul.

It may be that a man who has every material benefit, and who lives surrounded by all the greatest comfort modern civilization can give him, is denied the all important gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is indeed a good and praiseworthy thing to progress materially, but in so doing, let us not neglect the more important spiritual progress, and close our eyes to the Divine light shining in our midst.

Only by improving spiritually as well as materially can we make any real progress, and become perfect beings. It was in order to bring this spiritual life and light into the world that all the great Teachers have appeared. They came so that the Sun of Truth might be manifested, and shine in the hearts of men, and that through its wondrous power men might attain unto Everlasting Light.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 71–2.

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ON THE COVER: Youth who offered a summer of service in the Kipps Lane neighbourhood in London, Ont. advanced their study of the Ruhi sequence of courses during a camp.

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Ridván 2025

To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2025.

Dearly loved Friends,

With but a year remaining before the first phase of the Nine Year Plan concludes, we are eager to report on its progress—how, through shining examples of noble endeavour, the vision offered by the Faith is filling more and more hearts with hope.

The process of growth continues to advance. Striking breakthroughs have occurred in varied climes, where significant progress had not previously been witnessed, as the seed of the Faith has yielded new green shoots and the capacity for working with many souls at once has begun to emerge. These advances have often been made possible by devoted pioneers who, hearts aglow with the love of their Lord, have hastened to posts on the home front and abroad in impressive numbers. In clusters where a programme of growth had already begun, renewed attention has been given to applying, with creativity and ingenuity, those recognized strategies and lines of action that will enable the friends to pass the second and third milestones. And in clusters of proven strength, glimmerings of the society-building power of the Faith are becoming more visible, as a vibrant and transformative pattern of Bahá'í life is embraced by a growing company of galvanized souls.

Meanwhile, grassroots engagement with society has taken remarkable strides forward. Community-based initiatives of social action focused on education have multiplied the most rapidly, but other initiatives have progressed too, in fields such as agriculture, health, the environment, the empowerment of women, and the arts. Advances of this kind are most evident in the strongest clusters, where many a village or neighbourhood—even a single street or high-density building—is home to a population that is experiencing the upliftment which comes from translating the principles of the Faith into tangible reality. In places, civic leaders and individuals

with responsibility for children's education or social development at the local level are not just turning to the Bahá'ís for perspectives, but are seeking to collaborate in the search for practical solutions. Further, we are pleased to see that at the national and international levels, the Bahá'í approach to certain important discourses is attracting growing consideration and admiration.

The Nine Year Plan relies on a vast, global process of learning that is as effective in the highlands of Bolivia as in the suburbs of Sydney. This process of learning has given rise to strategies and actions adaptable to every setting. It is systematic; it is organic; it is all embracing. It creates connections, blossoming into dynamic relationships, among families, among neighbours, among youth, and among all who are ready to be protagonists in this glorious undertaking. It raises up communities that brim with potential. It enables the fulfilment of high aspirations shared by people who had been kept apart by geography, language, culture, or conditioning but have now heard and responded to Bahá'u'lláh's universal call to "ceaselessly strive for the betterment of the lives of one another". And it is wholly reliant on the invigorating potency of the Word of God—that "unifying force", "the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity"—and on the sustained action it inspires.

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

— The Universal House of Justice

Message regarding family life and marriage

To the Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025.

Dearly loved Friends,

The nature of the flourishing communities that the Bahá'í world is striving to raise has profound implications for the family. It is within the family that the individual is born and nurtured, and within the family that individuals begin to learn how to live together with others. The family unit is the basic building block of community, and beyond, of the entire social order. Therefore, a society fashioned to meet the requirements of the age of the maturity of the human race requires both a mature conception of family and an ability to extend the insights derived from that conception to the relationships that shape the nation and the world. “A family is a nation in miniature”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains. “The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation.” Learning about a new pattern of family life is, therefore, an integral part of the effort to learn about the release of the society-building power of the Faith.

Historically, the family has taken different forms in response to the exigencies of the various stages of human social development. As society advanced, arrangements and definitions that may have been beneficial in a previous age reached their limits and were no longer suited to the next stage of human development. Expectations of parents suited to one period of history could hinder the development of their children’s abilities in another. Likewise, certain strong allegiances within kinship groups that allowed them to flourish at one stage could in a later one become obstacles to unity within wider social arrangements. And certain gender roles that characterized an early stage of human development could eventually impede the advancement of women and of society at another. Thoughts and theories of past ages must be re-evaluated, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains. Humanity “must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities.” For “the gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity.” A challenge for Bahá'í communities worldwide, then, is to examine the present practices in their societies, weigh them in light of the Teachings, weed out any undesirable tendencies, and learn to establish new patterns of family life suited to the needs of a new age.

It is, of course, not possible at this relatively early stage to describe the nature of family arrangements that must

ultimately appear in the fullness of the Dispensation. And different societies in different parts of the world, while recognizing the importance of strong families, face an array of forces that undermine the family in various ways. Nevertheless, the learning process that contributes to the movement towards a new pattern of life within and among families will accelerate as the Bahá'í world grows in capacity to apply certain essential insights from the Teachings.

Among the questions to be considered are the following: What are the characteristics of Bahá'í family life and how are they distinguished from the way family life is understood in society today? What is the distinctive nature of Bahá'í marriage and how does it foster family life? How do Bahá'í families contribute to the process of transformation in neighbourhoods and villages, and beyond? What are the current pitfalls and obstacles facing Bahá'í families that prevent them from achieving this aim? How does the framework for action of the current stage of the Divine Plan both strengthen family life and create opportunities for vibrant families to contribute to the process of community building?

* * *

A new conception of family begins with a new conception of marriage. Bahá'u'lláh observes that marriage is not only “the key to the perpetuation of life for the peoples of the world”, but “the inscrutable instrument for the fulfilment of their destiny.”

For Bahá'ís, marriage is not only a physical bond, but a spiritual one as well, with implications for life in this world and the next. Bahá'í marriage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart”, so that they “may ever improve the spiritual life of each other,” and so that they may “abide with each other in the closest companionship” and “be even as a single soul.” In Bahá'í marriage, two souls learn how to assist one another so that both may achieve their twofold moral purpose—to develop their inherent God-given potentialities and to contribute to an ever-advancing civilization. The relationship the couple establishes beginning with their marriage ceremony will, throughout space and time, affect the forging of countless new relationships among other people that can constructively reshape lives and communities.

The Bahá'í perspective on marriage transcends dichotomies arising from permissive and regressive perspectives prevalent in society. In Bahá'í marriage, love, equality, intimacy, fidelity, sexual relations, childbearing, and childrearing are integrated and their interconnection

strengthened, establishing a fortress for personal and social well-being. Permissive social practices undermine marriage and the family by disaggregating these features that are essential to human flourishing, while regressive practices over emphasize or distort one or another of these features to oppress family members. Adherence to the Teachings helps to resolve such problems. Much needs to be learned across diverse cultural settings throughout the world about the implications of all the features of Bahá'í marriage found in the Teachings. For example, central to the development of a new pattern of Bahá'í married life is the principle of the equality of women and men. As this principle is applied between the wife and husband within the marriage, the relationship is strengthened and thrives, and girls and boys will be raised with a new understanding of equality and its practical expression. The ramifications of this principle will thus gradually extend to future generations and contribute to the advancement of women until 'Abdu'l-Bahá's expectation that women will "participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world" is entirely realized.

Marriage creates family. And the sound relationships that are to bind members of a Bahá'í family are based on justice and reciprocity. Each member must receive the rights due; each must fulfil the responsibilities owed. "According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity," 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains. "The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed." These sound relationships among family members require conscious cultivation.

In the Bahá'í family, the married couple are true partners; one is not subordinated to the other. Together they navigate life's challenges—whether spiritual, material, or social—through prayer, study, consultation, and reflection on action. Consider, for example, decisions pertaining to the education of children. The Bahá'í Writings acknowledge the mother as the first educator of the child and uphold her prerogatives in this regard. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá observes, "truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgement, the understanding and the faith of their little ones." Yet, the father also bears responsibility for their education and upbringing, and cannot abdicate such a vital duty and leave it to the mother alone. And while, to support the mother in this role and ensure she is not disadvantaged by it, the father bears a corollary obligation to support the family financially, this does not mean roles are inflexibly fixed. Based on their understanding of the Teachings, the couple determine the best way to manage the family's affairs in response to different personal and social circumstances. Each stage of married life will present corresponding challenges and opportunities a couple must strive to manage, cooperatively and effectively, while ensuring both the wife and husband's spiritual, intellectual, and professional progress.

In the supportive environment of the family, parents offer attentive guidance to their children to learn to live a meaningful and purposeful life of devotion, virtue, and service. To this end, through their example and the pattern of their daily lives and interactions, as well as countless conversations, parents lovingly nurture in their children a host of qualities, attitudes, habits and capabilities of increasing complexity, adapting their methods and approaches across every stage of child development, from infancy to maturity. From an early age children learn to turn to God and to love Him, to pray and recite the Word of God daily, to see themselves as noble souls striving to develop spiritual qualities, to prefer others before themselves, and to express these qualities in caring and cooperative relationships. As they progress, they learn to become accustomed to hardship, to practice self-discipline and accountability, to become forgetful of self, and to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences. And as they increasingly step into the world on their own, they learn to develop an attitude of service, to diffuse and apply the divine teachings, to resolve differences and participate in consultation, to remain steadfast in the Covenant, to work for the betterment of the world, and to direct themselves to those things that lead to everlasting honour. The Bahá'í Writings offer parents a boundless source of insight with which to cultivate these and so many other vital attitudes, skills, and abilities, and the training institute provides essential support for the family by enhancing the understanding and capabilities of all its members. There may also be other resources available to assist in the material, social, and spiritual education of young people of which the family can take advantage—schools, community life, service projects, and so on. Yet the ultimate responsibility to ensure the proper and complete education of children resides with the parents.

As time goes by, the relationships among family members evolve and assume different forms. Carefully nurtured bonds of love and unity among siblings offer a lifetime of support and upliftment, and serve as a bulwark against the petty jealousies and divisions that can arise in the life of the family. Clearly, the rights and responsibilities of adult children are not the same as when they were young. Parents have to be sensitive to such changes as they prepare their children for maturity, attentively fostering autonomy and responsibility within the next generation as they grow up. Young people continue throughout their lifetime to respect and honour their parents, yet as they mature, they must take charge of their own lives and choices. In time, obligations change, and a child may increasingly be called upon by circumstances to extend assistance as the parents age.

The relationships of the nuclear family are embedded in ever-wider circles of relationships, beginning with the extended family. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins extend care and support that help to fulfil the purpose and responsibilities of the family. The characteristics of such familial relationships also extend to fellow Bahá'ís

and other friends, who can assist a family in various ways. In the close social network forged in a vibrant community, elders offer deepening, wise counsel, and distinctive example. Others step in as spiritual aunts and uncles to share affection and concern for the progress of young people and provide support that reinforces the labours and lofty aspirations of parents. Youth act as older brothers and sisters who, in numerous ways, assist and inspire those younger than themselves. In this way, the sense of oneness, of love, care, trust, and solidarity that are initially cultivated in the family begin to be woven into the fabric of relationships in the community.

Attention to financial affairs is an essential aspect of a coherent and flourishing family life and of the involvement of the family in a burgeoning community. Consultation between the wife and husband, and with children as appropriate, will determine how this material concern is to be balanced with the many other features and obligations of family life. Wise and attentive stewardship of family finances must take into account many considerations, including how money is earned, spent, and saved; how the education and well-being of the children are maintained; how much is to be allocated for the Funds of the Faith or to support community affairs; and how to discharge the obligation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. In responding to these and other such questions, the family provides a space to learn in practice about generosity, responsibility, the difference between needs and wants, and the management of material means.

* * *

Bahá'í family life opens an arena for dynamic interaction with the wider society. This interaction flourishes as family members strive to express in their lives the fundamental Bahá'í teachings. For example, the application of the principle of the equality of women and men, already mentioned, creates a distinctive relationship between wife and husband as well as among the children and the family as a whole, preparing family members to contribute to interactions in society that release the potential of all. Similarly, adherence to the principle of the oneness of humanity requires that children are provided with experiences that guard them from prejudice of all kinds and enhance their appreciation of diversity, which contributes to the ability to create relationships of unity and oneness in a divided world. In addition, fostering the capacity for the investigation of truth, for appreciation of the harmony of science and religion, for resolving differences of opinion and making decisions through consultation and cooperation rather than contention and contest empowers family members as effective protagonists in a process of social transformation. And developing qualities such as justice and compassion among family members prepares the children to establish sound and balanced relationships with others in society. Thus, the effort to learn to apply the Teachings within the family both generates within children a vision that transcends the family itself and raises consciousness

about the conditions and needs of the peoples of the world.

Cultivating a new pattern of family life also counters the forces of disintegration that are an inseparable feature of an age in transition. These forces assailing society have particularly affected the family, sundering its ties, and taking a heavy toll on its members, especially on children. They can expose family members to some of the most destructive social pathologies: an absence of love and care, neglect of the things of the spirit, dehumanization, poverty, insecurity, and violence. Individuals are tempted to surrender to a life of material distractions or personal gratification, thereby becoming mere objects to be manipulated by those who seek to impose their designs on society. Contrasting ideologies and identities, incompatible with the ideals of the oneness of humanity and a peaceful world, vie for the allegiance of the masses and contend for superiority with one another. Some of these movements plant seeds of prejudice and fanaticism which ultimately yield estrangement, conflict, and contention among the peoples of the world. Others may seem to conform to some aspect of the Teachings, only to subtly lead the friends away from Bahá'u'lláh's straight path. The forces associated with the process of disintegration affect different populations in different ways. The family, and the community as a whole, will need to learn to examine existing circumstances, grasp the nature and impact of such forces, and, with full reliance on divine assistance, develop preventive and remedial measures in order to weather the tumultuous storms of a perilous age.

The family members' intimate association and their earnest desire to serve others opens a unique social space: a Bahá'í home. A vibrant Bahá'í home is an irreplaceable element in the process of community building at the grassroots. In the loving environs of the home, family members support one another in becoming capable and confident protagonists of the Divine Plan, and they welcome and assist others to play a part in transforming society. In a Bahá'í home, warm hospitality combines with spiritual quickening and intellectual progress. Through activities that every Bahá'í family can offer in its home, it can demonstrate a way of life that can be emulated by all those who seek to counteract the divisive forces that feed discontent, conflict, and self-interest, and to weave the bonds of trust, cooperation, and constructive action upon which a healthy community depends. Indeed, in a range of clusters worldwide, groups of families are already opening their homes and working together to help to consolidate local activities and to greatly extend their reach and influence.

The concept of a coherent life of service is as relevant to the life of the family as it is to the life of an individual. The complex demands and opportunities the family faces continually evolve over time. Generally, advancing together on the path of service strengthens the family, and helps it address its many responsibilities across

every stage of the life of its members. At certain times when a possibility for a more demanding service arises—whether for a member or for the family as a whole—the bonds of support within a dedicated Bahá’í family can make the wholehearted embrace of such a sacrificial endeavour possible. At such times it is vital to keep in mind the essential nature of sacrifice, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, is to give up the concerns of the human condition for the things of God. Sacrifice makes possible greater service, but it is not the family itself that is to be sacrificed.

* * *

As we survey the progress of the Nine Year Plan, we are filled with awe and deep appreciation for the devoted labours of the friends. Across diverse settings worldwide, we witness a range of sacrificial endeavours resulting from the cooperation of individuals, communities, and institutions, as the friends engage eager populations in a process of community building, initiate a range of projects for education and social betterment, carry the work of the Faith to new places, and harmonize the many

commitments inherent in a coherent life of service. And despite the restraints of oppression or the upheavals of a disordered world, the friends persevere in their high aims. Countless souls worldwide are striving, within the limits of their circumstances and capabilities, to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. Toward these ends, the part played by Bahá’í families will be increasingly necessary and impactful in the years and decades ahead. All the friends have a vital contribution to make to strengthen this essential component of Bahá’í life.

“My home is the home of peace”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said. “My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined.” May your families and homes, dear friends, increasingly become a haven and pillar to sustain all humanity.

– The Universal House of Justice

Message regarding National House of Worship in the Philippines

To all National Spiritual Assemblies, 8 April 2025.

It is with hearts brimming with joy that we announce that the conditions in the Philippines now make it possible for a national Mashriqu’l-Adhkár to be raised up in the vicinity of Manila. The project to construct this edifice joins the six other Temple projects announced since the commencement of the Nine Year Plan.

– The Universal House of Justice



A children's festival in Paranaque, Philippines attended by more than 100 children. Photo: Bahá’í World News Service

Developments regarding Canada's House of Worship

To the Canadian Bahá'í community, 25 February 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

With hearts overflowing with gratitude, the National Spiritual Assembly is thrilled to announce the City of Markham's approval, today, of the rezoning application that clears the way for constructing Canada's national House of Worship on the beautiful, wooded site in the vicinity of the Bahá'í National Centre. This divine project now gains momentum, a spiritual and material enterprise unlike any other. Without further delay, the next steps in the process of choosing a design and architect are being taken, and many other aspects of the endeavour can now advance. On this first of the Days of Há, this season of rejoicing, how our joy in sharing this news with you is amplified!

Each whispered prayer, whether it has risen from the many visitors to the site or from farther afield, has contributed to this wonderful accomplishment. Each sacrificial gift

towards the erection of this momentous structure recalls 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that even the act of "laying but one brick for [it] or one of its dependencies is like unto building a lofty edifice"¹. Every service dedicated to the oneness of humanity strengthens the foundation on which it rises.

Dear friends, in a few short days, the sacred period of the Fast begins. We hope that you will set aside time during the Fast to refresh your study of the stirring compilation entitled *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*, attached. As you gather for prayers with family, friends or neighbours, igniting "countless beacons of light against the gloom", opening the city of the human heart, and evoking the spirit of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, our prayers and love are with you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Karen McKye, Secretary

¹ <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/institution-mashriqu'l-adhkar/institution-mashriqu'l-adhkar.pdf?4093d6a5>

Membership of the National Spiritual Assembly

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 28 March 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly has received a request from one of its members, Ms. Judy Filson, to be permitted to relinquish her membership on the National Assembly, owing to the effects of advancing years and the increasing demands of service.

Having studied guidance and knowing that this request has been made with the best interests of the Cause at heart, the Assembly has agreed to release Ms. Filson from service on the National Assembly, with grateful acknowledgement of her contributions to this institution as a member since her election in 1992. She will continue to serve until the election at the National Convention, to be held 25–28 April this year.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Karen McKye, Secretary

Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 29 April 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are happy to share with you the results of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly on Sunday, 27 April 2025. The following individuals were elected by the delegates at the National Convention to serve as members of the National Spiritual Assembly

for the coming year: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Nabet Fani, Hoda Farahmandpour, Ciprian Jauca, Karen McKye and Veronica Robinson.

In addition, the National Assembly is pleased to convey the results of the election of its officers on 6 May 2024: Chairman – Ciprian Jauca; Vice-chairman – Jordan Bighorn; Treasurer – Mehran Anvari; Secretary – Karen McKye; Assistant Secretary – Nabet Fani.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary



Members of the National Spiritual Assembly (L-R): Alex Arjomand, Nabet Fani, Karen McKye, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Hoda Farahmandpour, Mehran Anvari, Ciprian Jauca, Veronica Robinson, Jordan Bighorn, photographed at the site for the National Bahá'í Temple. Photo: Liam Dousti

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

To the delegates attending the 75th National Convention, 25 April 2025.

Dear Friends,

With hearts filled with love and hope, the Board of Trustees extends its greetings to all gathered for the National Convention. We wish to convey to the National Spiritual Assembly our deep gratitude for offering this opportunity to share with you some reflections on the transformative power of this mighty law of Huqúqu'lláh, the Right of God, which serves as a safeguard for all of us, individuals, families, and ultimately communities.

Earlier this year, the National Spiritual Assembly shared the joyous news of the rezoning of the property, a major step in enabling the construction of our National House of Worship. This blessed institution, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, “causeth hearts to be illumined, souls to become spiritual, and the fragrances of the Kingdom of Glory to be inhaled, the world of humanity is ‘transformed into another world, and the susceptibilities of the heart are heightened to such a degree that they encompass the entire creation’”¹. We know that raising up this edifice will increasingly radiate the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh and will be a balm to the hearts of a suffering and disoriented world.

Contributing sacrificially to raising up the House of Worship while, at the same time, deepening our understanding of the Right of God, embraces our sacred obligation to both.

As we survey the state of the world, we observe an ever-widening chasm between the rich and the poor, a culture of consumerism fueling greed, political upheaval giving rise to economic turmoil, and wealth being obtained by exploitation and manipulation of markets. Economic conditions are rapidly deteriorating. Families are experiencing “poverty, insecurity, and violence”², and these negative forces are “taking a heavy toll on its members, especially on children”³.

The Universal House of Justice shared in its Ridván message last year that “the community of the Greatest

Name cannot expect to be unaffected by the travails of society. Yet, though it is affected by these travails, it is not confused by them; it is saddened by humanity’s sufferings, but not paralysed by them.”⁴ Strengthened by our faith in the transformative influence of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and with deep love for all humankind, we can seize the circumstances offered to us to make “individual and collective contributions to economic justice and social progress”⁵ wherever we reside, and with whatever economic means at our disposal.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh encourage us to develop a new attitude towards the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and material resources. As we generate income and acquire wealth, that which “will attract God’s blessings and ensure true happiness both in this world and in the next is the development of spiritual qualities, such as honesty, trustworthiness, generosity, justice, and consideration for others.”⁶ In developing these spiritual qualities, we are enabled to live coherently in the material and spiritual worlds and contribute to a flourishing community. “The acquisition of wealth”, writes the Universal House of Justice, “is acceptable and praiseworthy to the extent that it serves as a means for achieving higher ends—for meeting one’s basic necessities, for fostering the progress of one’s family, for promoting the welfare of society, and for contributing to the establishment of a world civilization.”⁷ We come to see that there is an inherent moral dimension to the acquisition and use of wealth.

The law and institution of the Right of God help us understand and apply these teachings concerning wealth. As we deepen our understanding of this law, reflecting meaningfully on our material requirements and God’s manifold blessings in our lives, we observe more clearly the relationship between our spiritual and material wellbeing. What a blessing for young children to be nurtured in a family where there is “space to learn in practice about generosity, responsibility, the difference between needs and wants, and the management of material means.”⁸ Observing this law in our daily life is much more than simply making a payment. Rather, we are called on to be consciously aware of the fundamental principles

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

5 Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017, Message to the Bahá'ís of the World.

6 Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010, Message to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith.

7 Ibid.

8 Universal House of Justice, 19 March 2025, Message to the Bahá'ís of the World.

1 Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, September 2017, A Statement on The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

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

3 Ibid.

underlying the law, the attitudes that we are enjoined to develop, and to regularly consider our situation from this perspective, whether or not a payment is due. These attitudes and the financial awareness cultivated through obedience to the law of the Right of God can provide stabilizing strength in difficult times.

Further, *“Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings provide a means for safeguarding us from the test of wealth by ordaining the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh.”*⁹ Returning to God a portion of His blessings with joy and without hesitation, for those whose situation obliges them to do so, is a sign of steadfastness. Observance of the Right of God preserves Bahá’ís from the tests of wealth and *“is conducive to prosperity, to blessing, and to honour and divine protection”*¹⁰, *“averts loss and disaster”*¹¹, and *“enable[s] them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions.”*¹² Dutifully observing the law of the Right of God provides a vital link between the individual believer and the beloved Head of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

The members of the institution of the Right of God, the Representatives and Deputy Trustees, are ready and eager to share the many educational resources available to them at community gatherings, in smaller study groups

9 Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 7 October 2005, in: Compilation, § 31.

10 Bahá’u’lláh, Compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh, no 12.

11 Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 25 October 1970, Compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh, no 54.

12 Bahá’u’lláh, Compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh, no 17.

or during intimate visits in the homes of the friends. Workshops available for study with the Representatives cover various themes:

- *Work, Wealth, and Service* explores the importance of acquiring a craft, trade, or profession while living a coherent life, in which we distinguish ourselves by our spiritual qualities, not our wealth;
- *Family Life and Ḥuqúqu’lláh* aims to help each member of a family develop an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization by rearing children to see their own welfare as inseparable from the welfare of others;
- *Wills and Ḥuqúqu’lláh* highlights the spiritual significance of writing a will and testament and the provisions related to the Right of God.

Beyond these workshops, the members of this institution are always ready to support tutors of the Institute process, particularly with the study of Ruhi Book 11, Material Means, the third unit of which is devoted to the Right of God.

Dear friends, please know how delighted your Representatives will be to support you, your family, and your community in deepening your understanding of this mighty law. Kindly consider reaching out to them.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada

Letter from the delegates of the 75th Bahá’í National Convention

To our Beloved Universal House of Justice,
27 April 2025.

This was a historic Convention. In a world overshadowed by deepening disintegration and the *“gloom of a stormy sky”*—marked by the fraying of relationships between nations, the coarse spirit of political contest, and the pervasive tides of apathy and materialism—we, the delegates gathered at the 2025 Canadian Bahá’í National Convention, were moved by the vibrating influence of a steady and radiant rhythm—souls building havens of peace, engaging in uplifting conversations that are knitting hearts together in love.

This rhythm became clearer and stronger as 158 delegates from coast to coast to coast drew on your stirring Riḍván message and shared insights, learning from one another in a rarefied atmosphere, poised to dive into the fourth year

of the Nine Year Plan. Delegates offered reflections on the implications of building havens: learning to ask difficult questions, seeing the interconnected dynamics of crisis and victory, and building capacity to accept ambiguity and discomfort. Havens were described as places not for rest, but for purposeful action, spaces where spiritual and material transformation can occur through drawing on the Word of God. Inspired by questions posed by our cherished Counsellors, Dr. Borna Nouredin and Mr. Ayafor Ayafor and the loving comments by former House of Justice member Dr. Javaheri, delegates also considered the shift in mindset as communities align themselves with the expansive prospect of the sixth epoch of the development of the Faith. This new state of mind was evident in story after story of protagonists from the wider community who are playing their part in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. Alive to the vision of Bahá’u’lláh, they are arising to problem-solve together, host activities, bring the Word of God to their own cultural contexts and make links with local institutions, such as schools and hospitals.

Surrounding our consultations were the heartfelt love and remembrance of the friends in Iran as well as a deep love for the institution of the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assembly. The message of the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and the devotions they prepared for one of the sessions strengthened this sense of love and gratitude for Bahá'u'lláh, His institutions and His laws. The delegates were overjoyed to have 100% participation in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, surrounded by the silent, loving prayers of a large group of observers, including many youth.

Signs of transformation were also perceptible throughout the delegate reflections: evident in the story of a group of young men in Toronto, Ontario, who drew on the March 19th letter of the Universal House of Justice to deepen their understanding of their role in their future families; in youth reflecting on the implications of the concept of coherence and having service at the centre of their lives; descriptions of the proliferation of “tranquility zones” in Coquitlam, British Columbia, inspired by a group of women recognizing the impact of having spiritual spaces for mothers and grandmothers; in the vibrant commemoration of Riḍván on Eskasoni First Nation and increased participation in elections there that followed a series of meaningful home visits, with fresh baked goods donated by a local baker who wanted to support the effort; and again in the stirring description of a junior youth group with Indigenous participants from Thunder Bay, Ontario, who have been building their own powwow drum through a grant from the local university, engaging Elders and raising the programme's profile in the community, all while studying the junior youth text *Breezes of Confirmation*, with one youth stating, “We want to have our own drum because we want to help more people enter the program.”

In honour of the hundredth anniversary of the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís

of the United States and Canada, a digital portal was also established, bringing together the Canadian and American National Conventions. These national communities welcomed each other with abounding cheers, love, and joy. Upon such jubilant greetings, a prayer was sung in Lakota, accompanied by the deep rhythms of a hand drum—like one heartbeat across two nations reminding us of our interlinked spiritual destinies. An echo of prayers back and forth between both countries then flowed, with prayers from the Tablets of the Divine Plan addressed to our two countries offered in Spanish, French and English.

Finally, with yearning hearts, the friends long to see the physical manifestation of the House of Worship rise—an edifice whose spiritual foundations have already been laid through countless acts of service, unity, and prayer throughout Canada as elements of one divine project. The path is prepared: permits secured, city approvals granted, vital relationships forged, and the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty felt at every step. As 22,718 souls have gathered in over 7,000 devotional meetings, the light of faith shines brightly across the land, each home and heart becoming a beacon of divine love, beckoning others through the vibrating rhythms of community life.

Truly, this is a time unlike any other, a moment pregnant with promise, purpose, and profound spiritual significance. Yet, as we know “*there is much to do*” and “*time is passing*”. We now look eagerly to the months ahead, responding to the call in the Riḍván 2025 message that “*efforts are needed now*.” We pray that the lights of each of our efforts will grow steadily brighter, defying the encroaching gloom and heralding the inevitable emergence of a new civilization. We stand ready to advance our sacred charge to bring His light, and steady rhythm, to every corner of this vast land.

– Delegates to the 75th Canadian Bahá'í National Convention

Response from the Universal House of Justice to the delegates

The National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 11 June 2025.

We were delighted to receive the message from the delegates at your National Convention this year. Against the backdrop of a storm-tossed society, the sanctity of their gathering and the undaunted focus of the friends on what will lead to true prosperity for all stand in relief as a testament to the transformative power of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause. It is a source of joy for us

to see the steady advance of the Nine Year Plan across your country, as the friends learn to engage a growing number of people in the ever more dynamic processes of community building under way in their clusters. In a diversity of settings, many more hearts are being connected, enkindled by the Word of God, beating as one. Thus reinforced, may the friends in Canada set out to meet their goals for the first phase of the Plan with loving determination, assured of our prayers in the Holy Shrines, beseeching the Blessed Beauty to send down His aid “in such wise that all may be astounded”!

– The Universal House of Justice

About this issue

The title of this issue is *Building a haven*. In its Rīdván 2024 message, the House of Justice called to mind the Guardian's description of the parallel processes of disintegration and integration in human affairs, assuring us that through the latter, society's "ultimate haven" is being built up.

The House of Justice sees this haven "[I]n every account of a heart being enkindled with the love of God, a family opening up its home to new friends, collaborators drawing on Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to address a social problem, a community strengthening a culture of mutual support, a neighbourhood or village learning to initiate and sustain the actions necessary for its own spiritual and material progress, a locality being blessed with the emergence of a new Spiritual Assembly."¹

The National Assembly also spoke to this theme in its annual report, writing, "The havens that will shelter humanity, far from being environments for retreat from the world through relaxation and rest, are places of meaningful, collaborative, purposeful, sustained action. They are havens from confusion and despair, from sorrow and paralysis in the face of powerful forces assailing the planet." In this issue, we illustrate some of the ways these havens are being built across Canada.

Of course, we build these havens with others, not for them. Our feature article for this issue, "Kipps Lane, London, Ont.: Transformation at the level of culture," draws on conversations with Bhutanese-Nepali youth, many of whom have crossed the threshold and declared their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh. These youth describe how applying His Teachings individually and collectively has transformed their thoughts and behaviour.

At this year's National Convention, delegates shared stories about how, through the educational process, safe spaces are being created where noble aspirations are freely voiced and acted upon. And again, in its annual report, the National Assembly affirmed that the "physical haven" of Canada's House of Worship "could not rise but for the foundation of the spiritual havens the lovers of Bahá'u'lláh have created and are extending in every possible setting." A story on the Convention is included in this issue, which also appeared on the Bahá'í Canada website, along with a larger selection of photos than printed here.

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

The Canadian Bahá'í community is rising to greater heights both spiritually and materially and must continue to soar. The role of deputization was recently highlighted by the National Assembly.² Contributions of this kind are ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as acts of teaching and, among other purposes, support pioneers, youth service volunteers, and institute personnel. The story "Roy Wilhelm deputizes Martha Root to teach the Cause" is a moving account of two close friends and Hands of the Cause of God, and a reminder that even Martha Root, "that archetype of Bahá'í itinerant teachers and the foremost Hand raised by Bahá'u'lláh since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing,"³ had a safety net and was not left alone.

The article "The moral dimension of material means" continues in this vein, exploring the implications of several passages from the Bahá'í Writings on the topic of economic life, for the individual, family, and community. These Writings challenge us to break away from prevalent notions of material progress and highlight how, though we do not have clarity on what any future economic system will be, the Laws of the Faith are a safeguard and can be applied now. We hope to continue generating content on this topic with more concrete examples from the community.

Learning around the youth movement in Canada continues to deepen. The article "A seamless educational experience: from junior youth to youth" shares how graduates of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program in two neighbourhoods in Toronto, Ont., are being supported to arise to serve and transition to studying the main sequence of courses, requiring flexibility and a nuanced understanding of this unique time in the life of an individual.

Increasingly, youth are also bringing their entire family into the process. The Universal House of Justice's recent message on family life and marriage has opened many points of reflection for the Bahá'í community. As this message states, "May your families and homes, dear friends, increasingly become a haven and pillar to sustain all humanity."⁴

2 From the National Spiritual Assembly to all those gathered at Canada's unit conventions, 30 January 2025.

3 Effendi, Shoghi. *God Passes By*, U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust (1979), p. 379.

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

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.



Hand of the Cause Roy C. Wilhelm
Photos: Bahá'í International Community



Hand of the Cause Martha Root

Roy Wilhelm deputizes Martha Root to teach the Cause

The following article, which relies on excerpts from the book *Servant to the Servants: Roy C. Wilhelm, Hand of the Cause of God*, describes his friendship with fellow Hand of the Cause Martha Root, whom he supported both spiritually and materially as she traversed the globe four times as a prolific teacher of the Bahá'í Faith.

Meeting a lifelong friend

In 1908, Roy Wilhelm, an early American Bahá'í from New York City, had recently returned from a pilgrimage to 'Akká and Haifa, where he had the bounty of being with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He undertook the journey to

support his mother, who was a Bahá'í, but the experience ultimately transformed his own life, and he also came to embrace the Faith. Soon after returning home, he was on a business trip to Pittsburgh, PA, where he found himself seated alone in a busy restaurant. He overheard the conversation of a group of women at the next table

who had come from a missionary convention; among them was 36-year-old Martha Root, who attended as the religion and society editor of the Pittsburgh Post. One of the women was questioning whether unbelieving souls were truly “lost.” When the group got up to leave, Roy took the opportunity to describe how he had just returned from the East, and that in the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, people from all religious backgrounds had overcome their antagonism toward each other and gathered in unity. Martha, intrigued, gave him her card and was provided with some Bahá’í literature.¹

She didn’t read the literature herself, but as she didn’t want it to go to waste, forwarded it to various groups, such as the Theosophists, whom she thought might be interested. However, Roy reached out to her again, and she began a serious investigation of the Faith, declaring the following year.² Roy was to be a lifelong friend and confidant. In 1912, they were among those who associated with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during his travels to America, organizing occasions for Him to gather with the friends and deliver talks.

The book *Servant to the Servants* describes one of these significant occasions. The Unity Feast, held on a property owned by the Wilhelm family in New Jersey, particularly inspired Martha Root in her teaching efforts. Nizin et al. write:

One of those most deeply touched by the 1912 picnic at the Wilhelms’ home was the family’s friend, Martha Root, and she wanted to express that inspiration through action. Since that first encounter with Roy in the Pittsburgh restaurant, she had become a devoted, knowledgeable believer as well as close friend to all three Wilhelms.³ Opportunities to spend time with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, such as at the Unity Picnic, stoked the fire within her to share the message of the new day with as many people as possible. She was already an experienced international traveler, having toured Europe with her family as a youth, and, years later, covering a sporting event in Ireland as a reporter. This taste of the world beyond the borders of North America created within Martha an insatiable longing to spread the Faith by traveling not only across the country (like Roy), but around the globe...Her plan was to ask her employer, a Pittsburgh newspaper, to continue to pay her salary as well as cover her expenses in exchange for articles she would write about her travels.

Roy introduced her proposal to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when he met with Him in New York on November 12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded that Martha had underestimated not only the expenses involved, but also the hardship of the journey she proposed, especially the difficulties of traveling within Persia. He asked that she remain in Pittsburgh for the time being. However, He did not close the door on the idea and stated at the end of His discussion with Roy

that, “If any paper will ensure her salary and expenses fully, she may go.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response to Martha’s proposal was not what she had hoped for. Her spiritual brother tried to help her view it as being for the best and wrote:

I don’t believe this will be as much of a disappointment to you as it was a year ago. I think too, Martha, it is a mistake to strain too hard to create conditions. I believe in trying to be in shape to grasp opportunities when they come and then to lay low for the arrival of the when, and I doubt if your whenly [sic]* for this big jaunt has yet arrived, though I some how feel in my bloomin’ bones that it will come.⁴

Arising to deputize pioneers

Roy would play a vital role in helping Martha’s aspirations become a reality. He was a wealthy businessman, head of the family coffee company, and often travelled across the country to teach the Faith himself. Even after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left America and returned to the Holy Land, Roy corresponded with Him regarding both personal matters and the development of the Faith.

It seems that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the first to introduce the concept of deputization. Roy had written to Him describing another teaching trip that he intended to take. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response begins by praising Roy: “[L]ike unto a solid mountain thou are unshakable in the Straight Path and save service in the Kingdom of God thou has no other hope and aim.” As Nizin et al. write, “Then came the new guidance”:

Now thou art again intending to make another extensive journey. If during this trip, thy absence from New York will not affect the normal state of thy trade, then it is very acceptable: but if on the other hand the long time consumed in the voyage will react upon thy commerce and at present it is in a condition of prosperity, and growth, then select someone else to make this journey in thy place. However such an one must be a firm soul and eloquent. Then after finding such a person, send him traveling around instead of yourself.⁵

Nizin et al. write:

Over the next few years, Roy faithfully carried out this injunction, not only by remaining at his office where he continued to serve as the Bahá’í community postman, but also by assisting others to travel to spread the faith. Martha, for example, would circle the planet four times with him ever at the ready as her safety net and cheerleader.

Roy knew that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s continued insistence that he take care not to neglect his business affairs in order to serve the Faith did not arise from a desire for Roy to contribute more money to the Cause. The embodiment of generosity, Roy was always willing to share his growing

1 Garis, M.R. *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold*, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983, pp. 40–1.

2 *Lioness at the Threshold*, p. 42.

3 This refers to Roy Wilhelm and his parents, with whom Martha Root was also very close.

4 Nizin, Joel, et al. *Servant to the Servants: Roy C. Wilhelm, Hand of the Cause of God*, U.S. Bahá’í Publishing Trust (2023) pp. 139–140.

5 *Servant to the Servants*, p. 146.



Hand of the Cause Martha Root with a group of women in Melbourne, Australia, c. 1924.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community

material wealth. This kind of generosity was not, however, what 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted. He only wanted Roy's heart and had written a letter to this effect to Roy only a few months earlier:

Concerning the fund: all that you and the steadfast believers of God have belongs to me. Whenever anything is needed I will unquestionably refer the matter to you. But at present it is not needed at all. I do not ask the friends to give up their money; but I ask the giving up of the heart and soul—thus may they sacrifice their lives in the Path of God. This is the real contribution, otherwise it has no importance whatsoever.⁶

Martha sets off

A few years after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey through America, and despite being diagnosed with breast cancer, Martha Root's desire to travel to teach the Faith was as strong as ever. With Roy's many forms of support, she set off on her first voyage in 1915.

Nizin et al. describe the conditions surrounding this journey:

By the autumn of 1914, the flames of war were consuming more and more of Europe, beginning with the atrocities and devastation committed in little Belgium as German boots marched across it on their way to invade France. The conflagration then spread to the east toward the Holy Land, where the Ottoman Empire had entered the war on the side of Germany.

Back in Roy's world, Martha was, despite the expanding conflict, eager to begin traveling outside the United States to bring the Bahá'í Faith to places around the world where it was not yet known. Only someone as persistent and focused as Martha would consider a journey traversing Europe at such a time. Yet she was determined to go and, in addition, to reach the Holy Land as part

of her itinerary. She did not even wait for good weather when booking passage to cross the Atlantic but sailed from New York in cold, stormy January 1915. Roy must have had his misgivings and fears, but if Martha was set on going—for she was as immovable in her resolve as he was—he would make good use of the opportunity by using her as a courier to deliver the princely sum of \$2,000 in gold to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who needed it because of the war. She safely reached British-held Egypt, but after weeks of trying, she never obtained the necessary permission to enter Ottoman Palestine. However, she was able to find a trustworthy means of transferring the gold from Egypt to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. With this feat accomplished, though disappointed that she was not allowed to deliver Roy's gold to 'Abdu'l-Bahá herself, she departed for India, away from the main theaters of the war.⁷

Martha Root's safety net

This first trip, during which Martha travelled to Egypt, India, Myanmar, Japan and Hawaii, lasted about seven months, after which she returned to the United States for five years, where she continued to teach and attend to family responsibilities, particularly her ailing father. In 1920, she set off again, visiting several cities in Canada, including St. John's, Nfld., Montreal, Que., London, Ont., and St. Thomas, Ont. She then set off to Mexico and Guatemala. Martha returned once again to the United States to look after her father, who passed away in 1922. He left her an inheritance, and at the age of 50 it provided the means to continue her worldwide travels to teach the Faith. During this period, she travelled extensively, including to Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Hong Kong and South Africa.⁸

Throughout this time, Roy supported Martha in many ways. Nizin et al. write:

⁷ *Servant to the Servants*, pp. 147–48.

⁸ *Lioness at the Threshold*, viii.

⁶ *Servant to the Servants*, p. 147.

While in Geneva, Switzerland on behalf of the Faith in 1925, she [Martha] teasingly expressed her heartfelt appreciation for all that Roy had done for her and the Root family over the years, and she acknowledged even little tokens of friendship such as sending coffee to her sister-in-law. Nor had she forgotten that Roy and Laurie has surprised her with first-class passage for her first voyage to China. Practical Roy made sure Martha had a large travel trunk for her belongings and also gave her a little cloth security pouch to wear discreetly around her neck to safeguard emergency funds. Much as a big sister, she discussed the picnic as she expressed her appreciation:

In anything big & little you have stood with me and one by one, each effort has been successful, it would have been very hard to go forward in China and here & everywhere without your help. Personally, too, your message and meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá and trying to live the Bahai life has brought me such happiness...⁹

However, this assistance did not necessarily make life easy for Martha Root. Nizin et al. describe how a single woman traveling alone was generally frowned upon at the time. And despite the offers of help from her friend, she preferred to be as self-sufficient as possible and follow in the footsteps of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who lived frugally.¹⁰

Nizin et al. continue:

If needed, Roy was ready to send aid to Martha. She, however, was only willing to accept his financial assistance when there was no other choice but to do so, and she most often insisted upon reimbursing him whenever she was able. Once Roy tried to send her emergency funds and ended up having to wire money to three different countries before she finally received it. She appreciated his role as her friend and financial safety net and sent him details of her expenditures, even recounting how she was restricting her food purchases, so that he could see she was managing by herself. His love and admiration for Martha grew all the more. In his mirthful yet practical fashion, Roy reminded her that his financial resources were for the service of the Cause and said "Wilhelmité' is thus far a spring in which Bahá'u'lláh deposits as fast—even faster than the water is withdrawn....Keep me informed at all times as to your financial outlook say for sixty to ninety days ahead of you."¹¹

In return, Martha collected stones from all over the world, which she would periodically mail back to Roy, who placed them throughout his properties in New Jersey and Maine. There were stones from the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, from the Imperial Gardens in Tokyo, and of course, from Bahá'í holy places, including in Iran and Iraq.¹²

Martha Root continued to travel. It was soon after this time, in 1926, that she had her first audience with Queen

Marie of Romania in Bucharest, who declared her faith in Bahá'u'lláh, and with whom she would have seven further meetings over the next 10 years. In addition to traveling in Europe and the Balkans, after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Martha went to Haifa and spent time with Shoghi Effendi and the holy family, travelled to Turkey, Iran, Iraq as well as India and Burma, among other destinations. She taught continuously, distributing literature and publishing articles outlining the verities of the Faith.

A necessary period of rest

Although Martha Root braved many dangers on her travels, she was not left alone. Nizin et al. write about a significant instance when her dear friend Roy was called to step in:

While traveling in Sweden in December 1935, Martha suffered an accident from which she was slow to recover. Roy offered his home as a place for her to rest and recuperate and offered to pay her expenses to get there. Shoghi Effendi had learned of her situation and had judged from photographs of her that she had become "extremely weak and frail." Through his secretary, he wrote Martha to endorse Roy's offer and urged her to accept the invitation.¹³

The authors continue:

After a visit to her family in Pennsylvania, she joined Roy at his new log home in Stoneham Mountain for a two-month-long rest—a rest ordered by Shoghi Effendi himself. The National Assembly established a sub-committee composed on Mountfort Mills, Horace Holley, and Roy to ensure that no Bahá'í activities be scheduled for her without her doctor's consent. The breast cancer that had afflicted her for more than two decades was taking its toll, as was her age. Adding to her health problems were the burdens she imposed on herself by traveling third-class, enduring unheated hotel rooms, and eating a sparse diet. She was worn out.¹⁴

Nizin et al. write:

After her lengthy stay with Roy, Martha remained in the United States for several months before embarking again for foreign shores, sailing from California. Treating her as a concerned brother, Roy chided her about her habit of traveling without exercising caution and wisdom: "There is one remark in your letter that deserve [sic] a challenge. You say, Well anyway Bahá'u'lláh "will go" with me. No, Martha Bahá'u'lláh goes with us just to the extent that we use cautiousness & wisdom. We can't blame things on Bahá'u'lláh if we strain that law in any degree. I know too well that a good many of my troubles this past two years were avoidable I am going to be wiser now!"¹⁵

There is no record of where Roy and Martha last said good-bye to each other as she headed into the sunset on what she intended to be another global tour. They both no doubt sensed that their future connection would be a

9 *Servant to the Servants*, pp. 233–34.

10 *Servant to the Servants*, p. 281.

11 *Servant to the Servants*, p. 281.

12 Garis, M.R. *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, p. 374.

13 *Servant to the Servants*, p. 281.

14 *Servant to the Servants*, p. 282.

15 *Servant to the Servants*, p. 284.

purely spiritual one, and that they would never see each other again in this world.¹⁶

Martha's final voyage

At long last, after four more years of travels, in 1939 Martha decided it was time to come home. Nizin et al. write:

On her voyage back across the Pacific, Martha sent messages ahead to the Bahá'ís living at ports where she would be making stops. When her ship docked in Honolulu, two Bahá'ís came on board to welcome her: Katherine Baldwin and Henriette From. They found her so ill that they insisted she accompany them ashore to obtain proper medical treatment. Katherine opened her home to Martha and gave her a loving environment in which to rest and recover her health.¹⁷

From that point on, through cables and letters from Katherine, Roy was kept closely informed of Martha's condition and living arrangements. When she was able, Martha sent letters addressed jointly to a handful of her closest friends, including Roy. He, of course, offered to do whatever he could, especially to send money if needed. Martha, as usual, sent a detailed record of her mounting medical expenses, while insisting on paying for them from her own resources. She was determined to get better. If war forced her to remain away from the Far East, she envisioned traveling throughout Central America. Alas, it was not to be. The breast cancer she had held at bay for decades finally overcame her.

At the end of July, in a confidential letter to Roy, Katherine informed him that the doctors treating Martha saw no hope of her recovery and could only make her as comfortable as possible. She assured Roy that caring for Martha was a blessing for her and the other Bahá'ís in Honolulu:

Naturally I have felt a great responsibility because she does belong to the Bahá'í world, in addition to my own personal love for her. But I want to reassure you again that every thing we can possibly think of will be done for this glorious Soul, whose name will pass down in history from age to age as the outstanding teacher of this present age. Often I find myself wondering why we in Hawaii have been so outstandingly blessed as to be given the tremendous privilege to care for our beloved Martha during her last illness. The thought is almost more than I can stand at times!

Roy responded to that letter by informing Katherine that he had notified Shoghi Effendi about Martha's condition and circumstances. Roy added words that probably comforted not only Katherine, but Martha as well, when his letter was shared with her.

...I have compared Martha's herculean efforts to the beetle which in the writings was said to have even striven to attain the musk-sac. 'Abdu'l-Bahá went with me to a hospital to see a woman who was in the advanced stages of this trouble and who has been somewhat at-

tracted. He greatly comforted her by saying that this world seemed a long and important experience to us, but in reality it was less than an instant as God reckoned time and was hardly more important than the wing of an insect. A smile came over her tired face... the following day she passed from this "vale of tears."

One August 28, Katherine wrote to Roy to learn the wishes of the National Assembly regarding funeral arrangements for Martha. A week later, Martha sent a letter to Roy and a few others with details about the distribution of her estate and directing that her will and testament be entrusted to Roy. She added that, "I am so near the shore of eternity..." During her last days, in moments of delirium, she called out Roy's name numerous times.

Roy wrote one last letter to his dear friend, but she never had an opportunity to read it for she peacefully passed away on September 28, the day after it was written. Based on all reports, Roy informed Katherine that he was satisfied that Martha's finances had been taken care of and that, as she desired, Honolulu would be an appropriate resting place. He also forwarded funds from Shoghi Effendi designated to be used for a fitting monument for her grave. His note evinced deep gratitude for all that the Hawaiian friends had done for his spiritual sister.¹⁸

Shoghi Effendi sent a message to the North American Bahá'í community on October 3 announcing Martha's passing, extolling her extraordinary heroic service—the "finest fruit" the Formative Age had yet produced—and naming her the foremost of the Hands of the Cause of God as she joined the galaxy of Bahá'í immortals. He was well-aware of how close Roy had been to Martha. In a later letter, he expressed his own words of condolence to him for the loss of one who was like a member of Roy's family. In a letter written on the Guardian's behalf, he said that "To you, & to all the dear American friends who are now so profoundly deploring beloved Martha's passing, the Guardian feels moved to convey the assurances of his deepest & most loving sympathy in your great bereavement. He added in his own hand that he rejoiced "at the glory & joy that must be hers & which she fully deserves, in the Abha Paradise." Roy must have taken great comfort in that assurance, though he had undoubtedly reached the same conclusion about her worth many years before. Years later, Roy penned his own tribute to his longtime coworker and devoted friend saying, "Martha was a unique [sic]. She seemed to have been born for her special work. I doubt if there is another who has brought attention to the Faith to so many tens of thousands over so many corners of the earth. I sometimes think my chief reason for being born was to get Martha started."¹⁹

This article includes excerpts from the book *Servant to the Servants: Roy C. Wilhelm, Hand of the Cause of God* (2023) by Joel Nizin, Kathy Jewett Hogenson, and Gary Hogenson. Printed with permission from the U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

¹⁶ *Servant to the Servants*, p. 285.

¹⁷ *Servant to the Servants*, p. 288.

¹⁸ *Servant to the Servants*, pp. 289–290.

¹⁹ *Servant to the Servants*, pp. 290–91.



Last summer, several youth arranged a neighbourhood visit to the Bahá'í Shrine in Montreal.

Kipps Lane, London, Ont.: Transformation at the level of culture

After a decade of effort to advance an educational process in their community, several youth took the opportunity to reflect on instances of social and personal change.

In the Kipps Lane neighbourhood in London Ont., a group of 15 youth gathered each evening this past March to pray and break their fast. As usual, a period of reverent prayer and song gave way to laughter and camaraderie as they shared a meal. The bond among this group of friends, some of whom have been serving their community for a decade, has deepened over time, and many new friends have joined them. Although most are from families of Bhutanese-Nepali refugees, their friendship is based on far more than

ethnicity, age or personal interests. Recently, this group of young people had an opportunity to reflect on how service has given them a shared purpose and led to profound personal transformation. These changes have extended to their families and other social spaces.

In their neighbourhood, a relatively high-density area, children, junior youth, youth, parents and other members of the community are protagonists of a vibrant spiritual movement. There are currently about 11 junior youth groups with 80 participants, seven study circles with 37

participants and six children's classes with 50 participants. The first junior youth group in the neighbourhood graduated in 2019 after studying all the available texts. This group transitioned into the main sequence of courses and brought in some of their friends who had not been in the junior youth program. These youth moved from Books 1–7 through campaigns and study circles over the course of about two and a half years. Since then, cohorts of youth have entered the main sequence of courses from the junior youth program every year.



Through participating in the institute process, the youth recognize that true friendship stems from sincere and devoted service to humanity. Photo: Arianne Taheri

Regarding social action, a paper from the Office of Social and Economic Development states, “A process of community development, however, needs to reach beyond the level of activity and concern itself with those modes of expression and patterns of thought and behaviour that are to characterize a humanity which has come of age. In short, it must enter into the realm of culture.”¹

The youth tutors noted that a shift in the way Ruhi Books 1 and 2 have been delivered has proven crucial to this kind of progress. Immediately upon entering Book 1, youth are connected to the junior youth program and children’s classes, where they assist those younger than themselves. Youth are also accompanied early on to share prayers with their family members, adopting an outward-looking orientation that sets the tone for the rest of their study of the institute.

The tutors recognized that developing habits that affirm a spiritual identity—namely reading the Bahá’í Writings, praying each morning and evening, saying obligatory prayers, and bringing oneself to account each day—cannot be done over a mat-

ter of days. Practicing these habits forms a strong foundation as friends advance along a path of service, their lives take on greater degrees of complexity, and their resolve is tested. The youth also carry out home visits so that the conversation of building a better world can naturally extend to family, neighbours, and friends.

Developing the habit of prayer and reading the Writings

The youth moving through the institute support one another in their aspirations to draw closer to Bahá’u’lláh and to follow His Teachings. The conversation about declaring as Bahá’ís is extending naturally amongst the youth as a group of friends who are concerned with one another’s well-being and spiritual growth. They remind each other to say their obligatory prayers and encourage each other to memorize the long obligatory prayer.

Amon, a 16-year-old animator, shares his journey with obligatory prayer:

I had many questions around obligatory prayer and felt like I was trying to build the habit alone. I had no idea that the others were also trying to recite their long obligatory prayer, but as the Fast

approached a year ago, conversations around obligatory prayer and its empowering nature started to arise. I found out that my other friends also found it difficult and sharing our experiences brought a sense of relief and support. Although it’s a personal habit, we now help each other reflect on it. Through that reflection I saw that saying the obligatory prayer every day is a calming experience through which I slowly started to build my relationship with God.

Several youth have shared reflections on how developing the practice of reading the Writings first thing in the morning—often after they are gifted a copy of *The Hidden Words* during their study of Book 1—has reoriented their thoughts, words, and actions to more closely reflect the spiritual standard they hold for themselves. Personal reflection has endowed them with the clarity to live up to that standard. On, his love for the practice, Shaiman, a 15-year-old children’s class teacher, says, “Writing my reflections in a journal has helped me come to myself and think more deeply.”

Reading the Bahá’í Writings has also taken on a collective dimension as the youth take initiative to memorize passages and prayers that

¹ From a paper prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá’í World Centre, 26 November 2012.



A teacher assists two children to carry out an activity. Photo: Asher Smith

they find inspiring and share reflections on Writings and stories they have been reading on their own each morning and evening.

And reflecting on the dynamics of his own transformation, Shidan, a 15-year-old animator, shares:

Sometimes it's hard to hold yourself accountable but it's nice knowing that there are other people going through the same struggle as you and you're not the only one. When I'm struggling to build new habits and spiritual qualities, sometimes I still mess up—but when I do, it doesn't feel like that's a part of who I am anymore.

In recognizing that true friendship stems from sincere and devoted service to humanity, the youth are eager to turn to their friends and invite them to walk alongside them on the path of service. This required patience as the youth worked together to uproot unhelpful tendencies.

Overcoming barriers

One barrier to growth was the language that the friends used towards one another. In the past, the culture

A conviction emerged among the youth that, if we desire to see the transformation of our society, not only can women and men work together as equals, but they must.

was to tease each other with vulgar and hurtful language. The youth, largely being boys, also struggled to share their thoughts with sincerity, without a fear of judgment, effectively preventing them from thinking at profound levels and engaging in meaningful conversation.

Bikash, a 20-year-old coordinator for the junior youth program, noted that the societal norms so often placed upon boys to act distant and aloof have given way to relationships characterized by warmth and sincerity:

Now, we are fully able to express our feelings without fear of being judged and the youth are sincere and supportive in their friendships.

A conviction emerged among the youth that, if we desire to see the transformation of our society, not only can women and men work together as equals, but they must. Shidan shares further:

Before, a lot of girls didn't feel comfortable coming because of the way the guys treated them. This way of thinking came from social media and from our parents too. As boys and girls started serving together more, they realized that they could be true friends.

It is clear that only the arena of service made this possible, as in all other spaces—school, home, and online—harmful conceptions of men and women were pervasive. These youth have been able to challenge these prevailing attitudes with an understanding of relevant Bahá'í principles when they arise in conversations with other friends at school.

The institute is delivered in a number of modes, both weekly gatherings and intensive spaces. Over the last four years, the summer of service program has become an element of the culture in the neighbourhood. During July and August, when school is on break, typically friends will meet five days a week. In the mornings, they advance in different cohorts through study of the main sequence of courses and in the afternoons, they carry out acts of service in the field. As part of their service in the community, the youth organize camps for junior youth, children, youth, and families.

Previously, feelings of estrangement or bitterness would arise easily when friends disagreed or decided not to continue serving in the same way for a time. Now, the youth strive to be considerate of the inclinations and circumstances of one another and to guard against behaviours that contribute to isolation. As young friends are taking on greater responsibilities



A reflection gathering held at the neighbourhood centre in Kipps Lane. Photo: Asher Smith

as they grow older, the youth remind each other that service can take many forms and should accommodate different paces and strides.

Creating spiritually uplifting environments

Certain social spaces in which the youth engage are increasingly being influenced by the concepts found in the texts of the junior youth program and the courses of the main sequence. Years ago, the tutors encouraged the junior youth to avoid the neighbourhood volleyball team due to its harmful environment. Now the team is composed of friends involved in the institute process and collaborates with the junior youth program as a form of social action. They have studied junior youth materials as a team and said prayers together.

Bikash shares:

The transformation of the volleyball team has changed people's perspective of the youth in the neighbourhood. Parents now encourage their children to participate and see it as a productive opportunity to be part of the community.

Another youth shared that the Bahá'í Faith and the junior youth program helped him to overcome his struggle with substance use that had begun

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in his early years as a junior youth. He explained that he now understands that religion is not something used to judge people and to punish them when they have done something wrong, but that its teachings can help us to solve problems we face in life. A few youth have shared that, though their families raised them as Christians, they didn't believe in God until entering the junior youth program and now feel closer in their relationship to Jesus through the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

"Previously I was very disconnected. I said I believed in God but I don't think I really did in my heart. Understanding through the institute really helped me grasp the fact that there is something greater putting

order in the universe," this youth explains.

Living a coherent life

Creating spiritually-uplifting environments that encourage personal development has helped the youth to reflect on coherence in their lives. Increasingly, youth have been resolving inconsistencies in the way they think about who they are in different spaces, as tutors have helped them see service as the lens through which they view all aspects of life. This conversation is reinforced as cohorts of youth tackle these questions together. Richard, a 16-year-old animator, shares:

I had many groups of friends and I would act like a different person in each one, but the institute made me realize who I really wanted to be and learn about the distinguished standard 'Abdu'l-Bahá has called us to. I started focusing my thoughts more towards God, the meaning behind the prayers, and the importance of my soul's growth. It's not like transformation happened overnight and it's not like the struggles just went away, but I didn't want to feel like I was being fake at school, at home, at church, or in my community. In order to walk the path of God, you can't be walking two different paths at the same time.

This concept of coherence has also naturally extended to the youth's family life. Several families have started regularly saying prayers and reflecting on their meaning together. One mother shared that she was touched and surprised that her son had memorized a prayer and recited it eloquently since he rarely participates in church. Richard reflects on that experience:

When I was younger our family used to say prayers together, but we stopped over time because we didn't go to church as often. One day our Ruhi Book 5 group studied at my house and my mom was wondering what we were doing. We talked with her about what we were learning, our community, and some struggles in our home country and in Canada. We said some prayers we had memorized, and she was very surprised and impressed that her children were praying of their own volition. She doesn't know much English so she then shared a prayer from her heart. When we asked my mom to say a prayer at the Ayyám-i-Há celebration, at first she was shy in front of 100 people, but then she realized she was already close with most of the people there. You feel at home and at ease with people you have those deep bonds of friendship with, and praying with others strengthens those bonds.

Parents have also noted that, in the culture, it is uncommon for parents and children to discuss profound topics together, however regular devotional gatherings have provided them with the space to do so. Reflection meetings, now planned and carried out by the youth in collaboration with their parents, are celebratory and participatory spaces involving the largest cross-section of friends engaged in the conversation about transformation.

Pursuing higher education

The youth engaged in the institute are remarkably involved in their academics and in their school communities, for example clubs and sports

teams. They strive for excellence in these areas, with some taking on student leadership roles. Cynthia, a 16-year-old animator, shares:

I've realized that I have a motivation to keep my grades up that I wouldn't have had if I didn't join the institute. Now, I have people willing to help me with homework and motivating me.

In many cases, these youth are the first in their families to pursue post-secondary education despite formidable obstacles. Many youth have shared that their career aspirations have been shaped by a desire to serve their communities and teach the Faith. In university to become a teacher, Nima, a 20-year-old children's class teacher, shares:

The joy I get from teaching the children's class in the neighbourhood is what inspired my goal to be a schoolteacher. I like seeing the development of the children and how they can contribute to the community and society.

One youth shared she had planned a career that she felt was not compatible with the quotes she studied in Ruhi Book 2 and was excited to explore new possibilities. Another youth who wanted to become a professional athlete worried this would not allow him to serve but then cherished the idea that he would be able to teach the Bahá'í Faith widely during his travels for work. Isaac, a 15-year-old children's class teacher explains:

Before I thought money was all that mattered, and I should just get any job for my own selfish reasons. Now I think about how I can contribute to society, about how I can use my gifts given to me by God to make my community better.

Contributing to a rich cultural life

Other youth voiced a desire to study health or agriculture after organizing service projects related to the health and well-being of their population. Some have built a business

dedicated to teaching cultural dance to the younger generations in order to preserve and uplift their culture in light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. Nima continues:

When I was young we didn't really know much about our dance and our culture. Just like how children's class can be an activity where children get spiritual education, my friends and I talked about how we can help our younger siblings and cousins become educated about their culture and language, so we started a Nepali dance class.

Clearly, a true friendship among those engaged in this process is a common thread throughout all their endeavours. Reflecting on his friendship with his spiritual sisters and brothers, Amon shares:

A few years ago, I started to recognize that the animators and tutors sincerely have my best interest in mind and are true friends, even if what they say might not be what I want to hear in the moment. Now that I recently became an animator and accompany a group of junior youth, I'm learning about what it means to be a true friend to them.

— Asher Smith



The 75th Bahá'í National Convention

Elected representatives from across Canada came together to discuss how “havens of peace” are emerging in every setting, and to elect the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year.

From 25-28 April, 158 delegates gathered at the Toronto Bahá'í Centre in a consultation that shone as a bright light of hope for the country, and elected nine individuals to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada for the coming year.

In addition to the delegates and members of the outgoing National Assembly, Ayafor Temengye Ayafor and Borná Noureddin represented the Continental Board of Counsellors and addressed the Convention throughout. A number of members of the Auxiliary Board also attended as special guests, as did Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri, a former member of the Universal House of Justice.



Counsellor Ayafor Temengye Ayafor

Building a haven—referenced in the Ríḍván 2024 and 2025 messages—was a theme that the National Assembly placed before the Convention and the delegates kept returning to



Counsellor Borná Noureddin

it. In its annual report, read during the Convention proceedings, the National Assembly affirmed that the “physical haven” of Canada’s House of Worship “could not rise but for

the foundation of the spiritual havens the lovers of Bahá'u'lláh have created and are extending in every possible setting.” Both Counsellors helped the Convention register and reflect on the “growing urgency” of building this haven, combatting the forces breeding hopelessness in society.

There were many iterations of the concept of a haven throughout the Convention. A delegate from Nunavut said, “We are building strong relationships that can be a haven.” A delegate from Saanich, B.C. shared the story of an Indigenous youth who felt unsafe at school, but safe at the local neighbourhood centre.

A representative from the Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh in Canada read a message from this institution to the Convention, highlighting this Law as a means of economic justice and social progress. This Law is also a kind of haven, “a safeguard for all of us” as it helps to harmonize spiritual and material wellbeing in our lives.

In its recent message regarding family life and marriage, the House of Justice expressed its wish that the family and home “increasingly become a haven and pillar to sustain all humanity.”¹ At the Convention, it was clear that families are fostering an outward-looking orientation, extending a concern for the spiritual education of their own children to all the children in their communities. Several delegates commented on the experience of family devotional gatherings, and the effect of these spaces on the tender hearts of the children as their love of Bahá'u'lláh grows through prayer.

Of course, the Bahá'í community is not building a haven for others, but with them. Dr. Nouredin commented, “A haven is not something that keeps things out but heals the world within it.” This called to mind the expansive vision of the current Nine Year Plan, as Dr. Nouredin spoke of how the delegates are not only representing



¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025.



Bahá'ís but the entire population of their units, and that they should consider the conditions of all those in their areas. This was one of the shifts in mindset occurring across the country.

Delegates were encouraged to consider not only the multiplication of educational activities, but their impact in the lives of a population. For example, delegates from Montreal, Que. and Toronto, Ont. described how young people are finding ways to stop the habit of backbiting, and increasingly adopt language characterized by truthfulness and kindness.

How to create conditions where the youth can soar in service to humanity was another thread in the consultations. A delegate from Calgary, Alta. said that in her community, service projects, workshops to study guidance from the House of Justice, and participation in the seminars offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity have helped to raise up youth striving to live coherent lives of service.² A youth conference held in Ontario this past year also had a profound influence, sparking a surge of energy in the young, as shared by a delegate from Lincoln, Ont.

With regards to the Convention, a first-time delegate from Regina, Sask. said, “It’s been inspiring to hear other communities who have



² To gain insight into what it means for youth to live a coherent life of service, please refer to the 29 December 2015 message from the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, under the subheading “releasing the potential of youth,” among other guidance.



The Conventions in Canada and the United States connected virtually for a brief period to mark the 100th anniversary of the election of the joint National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada.

been where we are now and hear how rapidly things can change when there's a concentration of efforts. I'm really keen to bring home the stories that I've heard from these communities."

This year was the 100th anniversary of the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, which took place in July 1925 in Green Acre, Maine. This joint institution existed for 23 years, until 1948, when the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada was elected.

To mark this occasion, the National Conventions of Canada and the United States—taking place during the same weekend—joined for a short period via video livestream. The chairs of both Conventions called to mind the kindred spirit between these communities and their shared history as receivers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's charter, the Tablets of the Divine Plan. Prayers in Lakota, English, French and Spanish were shared. There was a spirit of jubilation as the delegates of both Conventions stood together in applause and cheers.

There was 100 per cent participation in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, with 158 of 171 delegates voting in person. The following individuals were elected to serve as members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year: Meh-

ran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Nabet Fani, Hoda Farahmandpour, Ciprian Jauca, Karen McKye and Veronica Robinson. Outgoing member Judy Filson was thanked for her 33 years of service on the National Spiritual Assembly. Earlier this year, the National Assembly had accepted her request to relinquish membership on that institution at the time of the Convention.

Since it has been two years since the House of Justice announced that Canada is to raise up a National House of Worship, the delegates were eager to hear about progress related to this spiritual enterprise. Members of the National Assembly shared that the rezoning permitting the Temple to be built on land acquired over 50 years ago is now complete, and a process is in place to select a design for the Temple and hire a project manager. An initial meeting with the Chief of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation took place with representatives of the National Assembly, honouring the fact that the Temple is to be built on their ancestral lands.

In its annual report, the National Assembly shared that there has been a rapid rise in friends supporting both the material and spiritual work of the Plan in Canada, eliminating the prospect of a deficit in the National Fund. Through pledges,

the necessary resources to raise the central edifice of the Temple are also ensured. As of Ridván this year, 13 of 28 international pioneers called for from Canada have arrived at their posts.

In a foyer of the upper hall of the Toronto Bahá'í Centre, a display created for the #OurStoryisOne campaign, highlighting the 10 Bahá'í women who were executed in Shiraz, Iran, in 1983. This exhibit was borrowed from an event held at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Man. to honour these women and the struggle for gender equality in Iran today. Prayers for the Bahá'ís of Iran, as well as those souls who departed the material world this past year were also offered during the Convention proceedings.

There were many observers to the Convention in the upper hall, including youth, junior youth and children. Several times the delegates mentioned that they were relating stories and learning generated by the friends present upstairs. There were also many volunteers and several translators who helped make the Convention possible, as delegates were free to express themselves in both official languages.

An observer from North Cowichan, B.C. shared, "The Convention is a space where all of Canada can come and learn from each other. When

you're here you feel like the whole country is so united."

Another observer from Kamloops, B.C. described the spirit in which friends came to the Convention as akin to Bahá'í pilgrimage, saying "To be able to come here and observe this process is like seeing peace on earth. Particularly, to come from an area where we are reaching for the third milestone, to hear the experience of all of Canada reaching toward these goals together is powerful."

A youth from Toronto, Ont., also attending the Convention as an observer, commented on how she appreciated how the delegates discussed both the victories and challenges in their communities, noting, "It's an open space."

Several observers shared how moved they were by the voting process itself, characterized by a spirit of reverence, reliance on God, and humility on the part of both the delegates and those elected to serve.

As the Convention days passed, delegates shared artistic presentations, acknowledging that the arts are a vital part of community life. A small group of delegates and observers composed a song that drew on contributions during the Convention, which they sang on the final day.

In its closing remarks, the National Spiritual Assembly shared its joy:

In your contributions to the consultation, we have heard a "made in Canada" experience of the descriptions in the *Riḍván* message—how the process of growth continues to advance, the breakthroughs that have occurred in varied climes, where significant progress had not previously been witnessed, as the seed of the Faith has yielded new green shoots and the capacity for working with many souls at once has begun to emerge. Whether those many souls are the 2000 in Indian Head, Saskatchewan or those in a high density building on Donald Street in Ottawa, you have thrilled us with the ways you are seeing those around you:



Observers, many of them youth, watched the Convention through a livestream on the upper hall of the Toronto Bahá'í Centre.

you have spoken with one voice about the effectiveness of our own process of learning, our own Bolivia and Sydney. The proven strategies and lines of action are being applied to every setting.

In the National Assembly's annual report, we referred to our sense that Canada is poised: Dr. Nouredin described it so beautifully on the first day of the Convention: that Canada is pregnant...We thought about the prayer that we all know and love, that speaks of blessed spots where the mention of God has been made; the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea and the island and the meadow. All these environments are now

becoming havens, where this one divine project is now leading us to raise up a House of Worship that reflects the sacred spaces in homes and families, in hearts and in conversations in every possible setting. How filled with joy we are, to have been with you this weekend. How grateful we are for your gifts of thought and experience. How our hearts brim with love for you. And how we pray, in the coming year, for your every effort.

All photos were taken by Gordon Braithwaite and Eugene Pace.



Portico entrance of the Centre for the Study of the Sacred Texts. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

The moral dimension of material means

This article explores the implications of several passages from the Bahá'í Writings, as well as those of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, regarding the economic life of the individual and family.

In its 1 March 2017 letter to the Bahá'ís of the World, the House of Justice called us to consider the “inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources.” It continues:

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.

Bahá'u'lláh sets out for us these lofty ideals. In one such statement, He tells us: “Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that

which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men.”¹

In *The Hidden Words*, Bahá'u'lláh also tells us that “results depend upon means.”² What results should we be pursuing, and what means are needed to achieve them? The society we live in is eager to answer the question of goals in terms of personal gain and happiness. Happiness, at least in certain segments of society, is defined in terms of consuming goods and experiences, owning things, and financial security. Studying a trade or profession to make a living or improve one's situation over many years, and eventually retiring, are the main activities associated with both these means and goals.

1 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XLIII.

2 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 80.

We are just as often encouraged to use entrepreneurship, innovation, and creative skills to “get ahead” in the world.

Yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that “the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.”³ Understanding these criteria expands our purpose and reminds us that financial success is not a true measure of our worth as human beings. This statement alleviates the stigma often associated with being of lesser means.

Pursuing a livelihood can be a means of serving humanity and is highly

3 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 17.

praised. In the same Hidden Word we are told that, “[I]t is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lieth the secret of wealth...”⁴

However, wealth is not acceptable in and of itself; certain conditions make it so. In a letter, the House of Justice tells us that, “If wealth and prosperity become the means of service at God’s Threshold, it is highly meritorious; otherwise it would be better to avoid them.”⁵

‘Abdu’l-Bahá further asserts, “Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy.”⁶

In addition to providing a cohesive conceptual framework for the goals of our lives and the role of material means, the Writings provide further principles related to the generation and use of such means. Among these are justice and reciprocity on a societal level, as well as generosity and sacrifice on the part of the individual.

Again in *The Hidden Words*, Bahá’u’lláh reveals, “Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.”⁷

In this passage, Bahá’u’lláh affirms the value of philanthropic deeds but also expands our understanding of generosity. In the Bahá’í Faith, generosity is not confined to giving material things to others; we are also

able to give our time, attention, energy, and prayers to our fellow human beings as we strive for the spiritualization of mankind. It also includes the act of sharing the message of Bahá’u’lláh freely, with loving hearts and “unrestrained as the wind.”⁸

Bahá’u’lláh tells us that, “The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.” It is interesting that these spheres of concern are not presented as sequential steps, but as an integrated whole, and only the first steps on the path of magnanimity and generosity.

In our daily lives, the opportunity to expend our wealth on ourselves and family is guided by the principle of moderation so often emphasized in the Writings, where both miserliness and excess are discouraged. The opportunity to spend our resources on our community is embodied in the Bahá’í funds, which sustain activity at the local, national, and international levels.

In its 19 March 2025 message on family life and marriage, the House of Justice again brought to our minds the question of material means in this context:

Attention to financial affairs is an essential aspect of a coherent and flourishing family life and of the involvement of the family in a burgeoning community. Consultation between the wife and husband, and with children as appropriate, will determine how this material concern is to be balanced with the many other features and obligations of family life. Wise and attentive stewardship of family finances must take into account many considerations, including how money is earned, spent, and saved; how the education and well-being of the children are maintained; how much is to be allocated for the Funds of the Faith or to support community affairs; and how to discharge the obligation of Ḥuququ’lláh.

In responding to these and other such questions, the family provides a space to learn in practice about generosity, responsibility, the difference between needs and wants, and the management of material means.

These advances in family culture occur within the context of the worldwide transformation brought about by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, a journey from organizational structures based on domination and self-interest to arrangements that enable individuals to develop their inherent capacities.

For example, in Canada, children and youth have been eager to contribute to the historic mission of raising up a National House of Worship. In one instance, parents realized that they often made choices about their spending habits that allowed them to give to this Fund; however, their children were not part of these conversations. When the children joined their parents in consultation about how they could increase their contributions to the Temple Fund—for example, by walking to work, ridesharing, and dining out less—a process of learning was initiated. Small steps can ultimately change the culture of our communities.

Collective transformation takes time, but there are ways to participate now. Bahá’u’lláh has provided a concrete basis for the development of a new economic system based on divine principles. Among the pillars of this future economic system is the law of Ḥuququ’lláh, the Right of God. This law simultaneously creates “a direct and vital link between every individual believer and the Head of his Faith”⁹ and establishes a means for combating the extremes of wealth and poverty. While it shares some features of a system of taxation, it is founded on a personal sense of duty and obedience, does not have any external enforcement, and is to be fulfilled with the “utmost joy and radiance.”¹⁰ This insti-

4 Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 80.

5 From the Universal House of Justice to the dear Iranian believers resident in other countries throughout the world, 10 February 1980.

6 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 17.

7 Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 57.

8 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, CLXI.

9 A Codification of the Law of Ḥuququ’lláh, March 1987.

10 Bahá’u’lláh, from the compilation Ḥuququ’lláh – *The Right of God*, no. 5.

tution demands the development of greater maturity as we strive to learn how to discern excess wealth. It also calls for individual action driven by principles rather than force or coercion.

Through an increased understanding of material means, structures of a new world order are emerging. Local communities have come together to cover the rent and purchase of neighbourhood centres, allowing for the expansion of educational activities. Collective approaches to material means preexisting within certain

cultures are being channeled toward noble goals. For example, some groups of families previously undertook collective fundraising in times of financial hardship or to support special occasions, such as weddings. With an increased understanding of the importance of education due to the training institute, there is now an intention to support the educational aspirations of the young in their community.

The conception of wealth as a means for achieving spiritual ends offers ample justification and opportuni-

ty for us to focus on education, careers, income, and wealth creation. It gives us a way to think about these activities—and the resulting material means—that aligns with our life’s spiritual purpose. Structures such as the Funds and Ḥuqúqu’lláh establish new frameworks for addressing the material needs of society. These are structures in which we can participate, effecting change in society today.

- Omid and Adib Afnan



A group of junior youth graduates from the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont., studied alongside older youth at an institute camp held at the Bethany Bahá’í Centre of Learning, October 2024.

A seamless educational process: from junior youth to youth

Friends from two neighbourhoods in Toronto share what they have learned about helping junior youth graduates transition to studying the main sequence of courses.

In its 30 December 2021 message, the Universal House of Justice asserts, “[T]he institute is a potent

means for the society-building power of the Faith to find release.” It continues:

Although the task of developing curricular materials to support this purpose is a long-term under-

taking, existing materials already aim to build capacity for a broad range of initiatives. Moreover, they offer a seamless coherent educational experience from the age of five, upwards to the age of junior youth, and through into adulthood, and they serve as a direct counterpart to the pattern of activities unfolding at the grassroots.

In two diverse Toronto neighbourhoods—Upper Don Mills and Roywood—the community-building process has been longstanding. Teams of tutors and animators have been learning about how the institute process can serve the needs of junior youth, aged 12-15, as they become youth. This requires an understanding of both the methods and instruments of the Plan as well as the social reality of young people. Experience demonstrates that consistent participation in these programs protects against negative social forces that can become acute at this age.

One point of learning has been that even within the age group of junior youth—a period into which the global Bahá'í community has gained considerable insight—there are nuances, particularly since, in Canada, junior youth typically begin high school at around age 14. The friends serving in Upper Don Mills and Roywood, both of which had an established pattern of weekly meetings with their junior youth groups, noticed that attending high school challenged these patterns.

The tutors attribute this in part to the changes the youth are undergoing in various spheres of their lives at this age. Marwa Sayed, a tutor and animator in the Roywood neighbourhood, explains that older junior youth become busy with homework, sports, and responsibilities at home, and face social pressures from being in a new school as they desire to fit in with their peers. They may also become occupied with paid work.

To respond to this, the teams began to think about this period ahead of time. “We can’t think about it when they’re in Grade 9 and on their last



Since 2019, junior youth in the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood have been caring for the same plot in a community garden.

book, notes Tahireh Mohebati, a tutor and animator in the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood. We need to start thinking about it in the transition time of their life, which is Grade 7 and Grade 8.”

As the junior youth transition to high school, Ms. Mohebati shares, “We treat them more like how we would talk to a friend. With the youth, we’re not going to be as strict as we were with the junior youth.” The animators also recognize that many things that may take up the youths’ attention and time at this age are rightful aspects of a coherent life of service.

A flexible approach was required. The tutors and animators in both Roywood and Upper Don Mills helped the junior youth complete their study of the texts in creative ways outside the space of weekly group meetings. This included organizing overnight camps specifically for those in Grade 9. Ms. Mohebati says that overnight camps are special because the junior youth are im-

mersed in a positive environment, free from distractions, which is conducive to individual transformation.

“You’re with the junior youth the whole time, so you can have more conversations about their questions,” says Ms. Mohebati. She continues, “In the evenings when they are hanging out or having meals, it’s a nice opportunity for animators to sit and talk with them.” Overnight camps have now become a feature of the institute process in these neighbourhoods, and every youth, not just graduates of the junior youth program, is invited to participate regularly. These camps can also reinvigorate a desire to continue meeting every week.

In Roywood, Ms. Sayed notes that the junior youth look forward to attending camps and want to progress at the same pace as their friends in their study of the texts. If a few friends are several lessons ahead, others will make sure they go to the camps to catch up with the group. “They are the most studious in



During a camp last summer, the junior youth organized a children's festival as a service project.

camps. They finish books very fast because they see it as a challenge,” Ms. Sayed adds.

Being comfortable among friends during camps has allowed the junior youth to explore topics on their minds through meaningful conversations. Around Grade 9, the junior youth begin to ask philosophical questions about the purpose of life, their spiritual identity as human beings and the nature of religious truth. They also have questions about what constitutes a healthy relationship, about schooling (the animators help tutor the junior youth), and how to choose a future career. As much as possible, animators created spaces for the youth to explore and discuss their ideas, while also reflecting on them in light of the Bahá’í Writings.

Exploring these questions often inspires a desire to study Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*. “Even though we were studying a junior youth text, they would ask us questions, and we’d say, ‘Hey, you know what? That’s actually in Book 1. We’re going to start that this summer,’” says Ms. Mohebat. The tutors began to document the questions the youth asked, including any barriers they had to participation, which were addressed by turning to the Writings. They also helped to deepen the youths’ understanding of the larger worldwide process they are a part of.

These types of conversations have nurtured deep friendships and mutual understanding. In Roywood,

the Grade 9 junior youth, who continued to meet weekly, wanted to see each other more often. Together with their animators, they created a “conversation night,” which takes place weekly on Fridays. Ms. Sayed explains, “It’s a kind of social space, but also whatever questions and concerns they have throughout the week or during the group or even just in their personal lives, they bring it to this space, and they talk about it with their friends.”

This space continued as the youth advanced to the main sequence of courses, and the Friday conversation nights eventually transitioned into a devotional gathering on Thursdays. Two siblings offered to host the devotional in their home. Each week, they hand out prayer cards or a book and invite every participant to say a prayer. They also enjoy singing the songs created from their study of the Writings in the institute materials. After prayers, the host and a couple of the other youth cook dinner and plate it for each person.

Another element that keeps junior youth consistent and committed to the process of developing themselves and their communities is, of course, the joy and confirmation that comes from service. In the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood, a group of junior youth who are soon to enter Grade 9 have started teaching a weekly children’s class.

For Nuka, a junior youth program graduate and now tutor of Book 3 from the Roywood neighbourhood,

part of what helped her transition when she was younger was the opportunity to serve consistently herself. When she was a junior youth, her initial participation was sporadic and involved mostly going with her group and neighbourhood on their outings and field trips. During the summer of the pandemic, many youth in her neighbourhood began to meet outdoors daily to study and serve and Nuka joined them. “It was an everyday routine,” says Nuka.

Then, when her sister could not continue teaching a children’s class, Nuka, 15 at the time, took over. Each week, tutors in the neighbourhood would help her plan lessons before the class. This pattern of planning and service continued for two years. “I feel like when you’re more involved, you have that sense of community building. That’s when I decided to keep being involved and continue to learn about the institute.” Now, Nuka is in a Ruhi Book 6 study circle in her neighbourhood and has also completed the first year of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity program.

She says, “I find that when you try to dedicate time to serving the community, that can also enhance your love and enthusiasm for being more involved...You see it actually having an effect on people, and I think that’s what got me to keep on going.”

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

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

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

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

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

Pilgrimage requests (nine-day pilgrimage or three-day visit) are to be made directly to the Bahá'í World Centre through the Bahá'í Pilgrimage Website <https://pilgrimage.bwc.org> or by post or email: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel; Email: pilgrimage@bwc.org

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

Submit news, photos, etc. to Bahá'í Canada through email bahaicanada@bahai.ca or mail to 7200 Leslie St., Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8.

Items submitted to *Bahá'í Canada* are considered for publication online and in the magazine.

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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

ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH PAYMENT INFORMATION

In response to guidance from the International Board of Trustees, the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada has set up a centralized system of receipting and recording of payments at the Treasury Department of the Bahá'í National Centre. Payments of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh) are not processed through individual Deputies or Representatives.

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

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

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