Appointment of the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

BAHÁ'Í CANADA



"…let every community advance from its present position to a stronger one."

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From the Writings

This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this Wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? A touch of moisture sufficeth to dissolve the hardened clay out of which this perverse generation is molded.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Lawh-i-Dunyá [Tablet of the World], *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdás*, pp. 84-85.

It is in Our power, should We wish it, to enable a speck of floating dust to generate, in less than the twinkling of an eye, suns of infinite, of unimaginable splendor, to cause a dewdrop to develop into vast and numberless oceans, to infuse into every letter such a force as to empower it to unfold all the knowledge of past and future ages. Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 107.

We are possessed of such power which, if brought to light, will transmute the most deadly of poisons into a panacea of unfailing efficacy. Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 107.

Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muḥammad, His Prophet? Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory. The Báb, Addressed to the Letters of the Living, qtd. in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 65.

O army of God! Make ye a mighty effort: perchance ye can flood this earth with light, that this mud hut, the world, may become the Abhá Paradise. The dark hath taken over, and the brute traits prevail. This world of man is now an arena for wild beasts, a field where the ignorant, the heedless, seize their chance. The souls of men are ravening wolves and animals with blinded eyes, they are either deadly poison or useless weeds–all except for a very few who indeed do nurture altruistic aims and plans for the well-being of their fellow men: but ye must in this matter–that is, the serving of humankind–lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 35.

If the heart turns away from the blessings God offers how can it hope for happiness? If it does not put its hope and trust in God's Mercy, where can it find rest? Oh, trust in God! For His Bounty is everlasting, and in His Blessings, for they are superb. Oh! Put your faith in the Almighty, for He faileth not and His goodness endureth for ever! His Sun giveth Light continually, and the Clouds of His Mercy are full of the Waters of Compassion with which He waters the hearts of all who trust in Him. His refreshing Breeze ever carries healing in its wings to the parched souls of men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911*, pp. 108-09.

Walk, therefore, with a sure step and engage with the utmost assurance and confidence in the promulgation of the divine fragrances, the glorification of the Word of God and firmness in the Covenant. Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 184.

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INSIDE BAHÁ'Í CANADA

ON THE COVER



A group of children in Calgary, Alta. at a children's camp centred on the theme of unity and friendship. The title for this issue is taken from the Riḍván 2015 message of the Universal House of Justice.

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THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Appointment of the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 27 October 2015:

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Day of the Covenant, 26 November 2015, marks the opening of a new five-year term of service for the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith. It is with great joy that we announce the names of the Counsellors appointed for the coming term, whose number remains at eighty-one.

AFRICA (18 Counsellors): Mélanie Bangala, Mariama Ousmane Djaouga, Alain Pierre Djoulde, Clément Thyrell Feizouré, Agatha Gaisie-Nketsiah, Maty Issoufou, Musonda Kapusa-Linsel (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Townshend Lihanda, Sehla Masunda, Maina Mkandawire, Judicaël Mokolé, Aggrey Zeyazi Munubi, Albert Nshisu Nsunga, Ahmad Parsa, Iharinirina Rakotomavo, Nancy Oloro Robarts, Christopher Kiprotich Songok, Djamila Tchakréo

THE AMERICAS (19 Counsellors): José Luis Almeida, Ronny Brenes (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Beatriz Carmona, Brígida Carrillo, Ingrid Umpierre Conter, Daniel Duhart, Farah Guchani-Rosenberg, Sonlla Heern, Nwandi Ngozi Lawson, Borna Noureddin, Arthur Powell, Carmen Elisa de Sadeghian, Pejman Samoori, Bernardino Sánchez, Navid Serrano, Mark Sisson, Raúl Taboada, Shabnam Tashakour, Holly Woodard

ASIA (22 Counsellors): Jamil Aliyev, Vugar Alizadeh, Walid Ayyash, Jabbar Eidelkhani, Shareen Farhad, Nadera Fikri, Kam Mui Sayers Fok, Gloria Javid, Lee Lee Loh Ludher, Tarrant Matthew Mahony, Nibras Sarmad Moqbel, Delafruz Nassimova, Myint Zaw Oo, Sokuntheary Reth, Foad Reyhani (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Hesham Saad, Rajan Sawant, Omid Seioshanseian, Dregpal Singh, Zebinisso Soliyeva, Ircham Sujadmiko, Fang Jung Tseng Chung

AUSTRALASIA (10 Counsellors): Ritia Kamauti Bakineti, Nadia Fifita, Kirk Johnson, Dinesh Kumar-Mills, Jalal Rodney Mills, Taraz Nadarajah, Daniel Pierce, Kessia Ruh, Tessa Scrine (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Henry Tamashiro

EUROPE (12 Counsellors): Naisan Azimi, Raffaella Capozzi Gubinelli, Olga Daradur, Aistė Elijio, Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, Zoraida García Garro, Bernard Lo Cascio (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Sabà Mazza, Yevgeniya Poluektova, Mehdi Rezvan, Amir Saberin, Paul Verheij

The following believers, who have earned our abiding gratitude for their self-sacrificing contributions to the progress of the Cause, are being relieved of the duties of membership on the Boards of Counsellors:

Selam Ahderom, Sohayla Asari, Enkhdelger Banzragch, Soheyla Bolouri, Uta von Both, Ann Boyles, Maziar Djoneidi, Bijan Farid, Amina Jaouane, Saba Khabirpour, Ana Hilda de Lemus, Katalayi Mbombo, Firouzeh Moghbel-Naderi, Zowé Tiba Nganyadé, Lori McLaughlin Noguchi, Helen Otia, U'ileiuluwehi Pimental, Khursheda Porsayeva, Ganesh Ramsahai, Leticia Iturburo Rivadeneira, Daniel Scott, George Soraya, Alan Wilcox, Anita Vandella Williams, Tiati à Zock

We are confident that these dear friends will remain a source of inspiration and strength to the believers as they continue their dedicated efforts for the advancement of the Faith in the coming years. We shall offer supplications at the Sacred Threshold on their behalf, that divine blessings may surround their every endeavour in the path of service to Bahá'u'lláh.

The series of Plans that have been launched since 1996 have focused the Bahá'í world on a single aim—advancing the process of entry by troops. The great strides that have been made during the current Five Year Plan have fully prepared the community of the Greatest Name for the final thrust in the span of years that will culminate in the centenary of the Formative Age. We are calling the Counsellors from all continents to the Bahá'í World Centre for a conference from 29 December 2015 to 2 January 2016, during which deliberations will be held on the exigencies of the next Five Year Plan—which will unfold during a period of time pregnant with rich possibilities—and on the decisive role the Counsellors are to play, together with their auxiliaries, in the critical months leading up to its launch and in the years that follow.

We will offer fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold that the consecrated exertions of these eighty-one souls may be guided and confirmed by the boundless grace and abundant favours of the Abhá Beauty.

- The Universal House of Justice

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2015 message

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Riḍván 2015:

Dearly loved Friends,

The resplendent season of Riḍván is at hand, and from the heights to which the community of the Greatest Name has attained, bright prospects are visible on the horizon. A vast terrain has been traversed: new programmes of growth have appeared, and while hundreds more must still emerge in the next twelve months, efforts to set in motion the necessary pattern of activity have already begun in almost every one of the clusters required to reach the 5,000 called for in the Five Year Plan. Existing programmes are gaining in strength, many showing more clearly what it means for the Cause of God to extend further into the social landscape across a cluster and within a neighbourhood or village. The paths that lead to sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation are being followed with firmer footsteps, valiant youth often setting the pace. Ways in which the society-building power of the Faith can find release in various settings are becoming more apparent, and those defining features that must come to mark the further unfoldment of the growth process in a cluster are becoming gradually discernible.

The call to carry out and support this work is directed to every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, and it will evoke a response in every heart that aches at the wretched condition of the world, the lamentable circumstances from which so many people are unable to gain relief. For, ultimately, it is systematic, determined, and selfless action undertaken within the wide embrace of the Plan's framework that is the most constructive response of every concerned believer to the multiplying ills of a disordered society. Over the last year, it has become clearer still that, in different nations in different ways, the social consensus around ideals that have traditionally united and bound together a people is increasingly worn and spent. It can no longer offer a reliable defence against a variety of self-serving, intolerant, and toxic ideologies that feed upon discontent and resentment. With a conflicted world appearing every day less sure of itself, the proponents of these destructive doctrines grow bold and brazen. We recall the unequivocal verdict from the Supreme Pen: "They hasten forward to Hell Fire, and mistake it for light." Well-meaning leaders of nations and people of goodwill are left struggling to repair the fractures evident in society and powerless to prevent their spread. The effects of all this are not only to be seen in outright conflict or a collapse in order. In the distrust that pits neighbour against neighbour and severs family ties, in the antagonism of so much of what passes for social discourse, in the casualness with which appeals to ignoble human motivations are used to win power and pile up riches—in all these lie unmistakable signs that the moral force which sustains society has become gravely depleted.

Yet there is reassurance in the knowledge that, amidst the disintegration, a new kind of collective life is taking shape which gives practical expression to all that is heavenly in human beings. We have observed how, especially in those places where intensity in teaching and community-building activities has been maintained, the friends have been able to guard themselves against the forces of materialism that risk sapping their precious energies. Not only that, but in managing the various other calls upon their time, they never lose sight of the sacred and pressing tasks before them. Such attentiveness to the needs of the Faith and to humanity's best interests is required in every community. Where a programme of growth has been established in a previously unopened cluster, we see how the initial stirrings of activity arise out of the love for Bahá'u'lláh held in the heart of a committed believer. Notwithstanding the orders of complexity that must eventually be accommodated as a community grows in size, all activity begins with this simple strand of love. It is the vital thread from which is woven a pattern of patient and concentrated effort, cycle after cycle, to introduce children, youth, and adults to spiritual ideas; to foster a feeling for worship through gatherings for prayer and devotion; to stimulate conversations that illuminate understanding; to start ever-growing numbers on a lifetime of study of the Creative Word and its translation into deeds; to develop, along with others, capacity for service; and to accompany one another in the exercise of what has been learned. Beloved friends, loved ones of the Abhá Beauty: We pray for you in earnest on every occasion we present ourselves at His Holy Threshold, that your love for Him may give you the strength to consecrate your lives to His Cause.

The rich insights arising from clusters, and from centres of intense activity within them, where the dynamics of community life have embraced large numbers of people deserve special mention. We are gratified to see how a culture of mutual support, founded on fellowship and humble service, has quite naturally established itself in such quarters, enabling more and more souls to be systematically brought within the pale of the community's activities. Indeed, in an increasing number of settings the movement of

a population towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a new society appears no longer merely as an enthralling prospect but as an emerging reality.

We wish to address some additional words to those of you in whose surroundings marked progress is yet to occur and who long for change. Have hope. It will not always be so. Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers—young or old—or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes? Do not imagine that your own case is inherently any different. Change in a cluster, be it swift or hard won, flows neither from a formulaic approach nor from random activity; it proceeds to the rhythm of action, reflection, and consultation, and is propelled by plans that are the fruit of experience. Beyond this, and whatever its immediate effects, service to the Beloved is, in itself, a source of abiding joy to the spirit. Take heart, too, from the example of your spiritual kin in the Cradle of the Faith, how their constructive outlook, their resilience as a community, and their steadfastness in promoting the Divine Word are bringing about change in their society at the level of thought and deed. God is with you, with each of you. In the twelve months that remain of the Plan, let every community advance from its present position to a stronger one.

The all-important work of expansion and consolidation lays a solid foundation for the endeavours the Bahá'í world is being called to undertake in numerous other spheres. At the Bahá'í World Centre, efforts are intensifying to methodically catalogue and index the content of the thousands of Tablets which constitute that infinitely precious bequest, the Holy Texts of our Faith, held in trust for the benefit of all humankind—this, so as to accelerate the publication of volumes of the Writings, both in their original languages and in English translation. Endeavours to establish eight Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, sacred Fanes raised up to the glory of God, continue apace. External affairs work at the national level has gained markedly in effectiveness and become increasingly systematic, further stimulated by the release of a document, sent to National Spiritual Assemblies six months ago, which draws on the considerable experience generated over the last two decades and provides an expanded framework for developing these endeavours in the future. Meanwhile, two new Offices of the Bahá'í International Community, sisters to its United Nations Office based in New York and Geneva and to its Office in Brussels, have been opened in Addis Ababa and Jakarta, broadening the opportunities for the perspectives of the Cause to be offered at the international level in Africa and Southeast Asia. Often prompted by the demands of growth, a range of National Assemblies are building up their administrative capacity, visible in their thoughtful stewardship of the resources available to them, their efforts to become intimately familiar with the conditions of their communities, and their vigilance in ensuring that the operations of their National Offices grow ever stronger; the need to systematize the impressive body of knowledge now accumulating in this area has led to the creation at the World Centre of the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems. Initiatives for social action of various kinds continue to multiply in many countries, enabling much to be learned about how the wisdom enshrined in the Teachings can be applied to improve social and economic circumstances; so promising is this field that we have established a seven-member International Advisory Board to the Office of Social and Economic Development, introducing the next stage in the evolution of that Office. Three members of the Board will also serve as the Office's coordinating team and be resident in the Holy Land.

At this Riḍván, then, while we see much to be done, we see many ready to do it. In thousands of clusters, neighbourhoods, and villages, fresh springs of faith and assurance are pouring forth, cheering the spirits of those touched by their reviving waters. In places, the flow is a steady stream, in some, already a river. Now is not the moment for any soul to linger upon the bank—let all lend themselves to the onward surge.

– The Universal House of Justice



Progress of the Plan in Canada

Only six months separate us from the end of this Five Year Plan and the launching of the next at Riḍván 2016. The next hard-copy issue of *Bahá'í Canada* will likely include a message outlining the framework of the next Plan, addressed by the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, which will take place in the Holy Land after the appointment of these distinguished servants of the Cause on the Day of the Covenant. How swiftly these years have passed, and how diligently and eagerly the friends have sought to apply the flow of guidance that has guided our path!

This brief message begins, then, with an expression of gratitude to the Counsellors who have served this country so sacrificially over the last five years. In that time, 105 of the 107 programmes of growth hoped for by the end of the Plan have been established, and work towards that milestone has begun in several more clusters. The response of the Canadian Bahá'ís to the challenge in the 2015 Riḍván message for each community to advance from its present position to a stronger one has been particularly heartening. Many clusters began the Plan without any core activities and now have around 10, signalling the emergence of new capacities and possibilities. Three clusters are engaging more than 1000 people in the community-building work, and one cluster with 520 participants in core activities has experienced an increase of 350 in the last two years. Homefront pioneers have played a part in strengthening clusters, with seven pioneers settled out of the 19 called for before the end of the Plan.

We have witnessed how the initial stirrings of activity arising out of the love of Bahá'u'lláh in the hearts of believers have evolved through patient, concentrated effort, into patterns of sustainable growth. At the same time, many friends in Canada live in clusters where marked progress is yet to occur. To these believers, the House of Justice said at Riḍván 2015: "Have hope. It will not always be so." Each one in whose heart is this simple strand of love, this "vital thread" that is woven into patterns that draw more and more people closer to the Revelation can ask: "What will my contribution be to advancing my community to a stronger position by the Plan's end?"

Recently, the National Assembly wrote the following message of love to the believers and institutions in the three northern territories, whose activity has been a source of joy throughout the year. Of special note is the vibrant movement in Rankin Inlet, a hamlet with a population of approximately 2,500 where a youth gathering with 25 participants was held last August and where junior youth groups and children's classes have been initiated. Knowing that the entire Canadian Bahá'í community rejoices in these victories, we share this letter with you and invite your continued prayers for this special region of our country.

> At the 2014 National Convention, the hearts of Canada's delegates were deeply touched by your video 'visit' with us all. The glimpses of Canada's northern landscapes were breathtaking, but paled before your own bright faces and joyful spirits. Throughout the year, you have been remembered in the prayers of friends across this country as we walk together in His service.
>
> At that time, the National Assembly called for a movement of homefront pioneers from British Columbia and Ontario towards the Atlantic Provinces, Quebec, Saskatchewan/Manitoba and Alberta, to assist in establishing and strengthening programmes of growth in those four regions. When we considered the special circumstances, experience and potential of the northern territories, we felt that additional time was needed to consider how best to support your stalwart, steadfast efforts to advance the Faith in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon.
>
> In comparison to the northern population as a whole, the number of Bahá'ís and their friends in your three regions is substantial, recalling this passage from the Riḍván message: "At this Riḍván, then, while we see much to be done, we see many ready to do it." It has been thrilling to see youth arise in all three regions, stimulated by the 2013 youth conferences and the follow-up gatherings in 2014, in which 22 youth from the North participated, 13 from Nunavut alone. This summer, gatherings of various kinds in the north, have further strengthened friendships among the youth and their commitment to common service. The activities thus generated have joined study circles, devotional gatherings, children's classes, junior youth groups, summer schools and firesides, gems tended and polished by your hands, to form a necklace of light across the North.
>
> It is the entirety of the community that has created such conditions among this receptive population. To learn more about these conditions and to build on the strengths that have emerged, the National Spiritual Assembly has asked two young believers who have extensive experience with the institute process and a special love of the North, to visit your regions. Mania Nematifar lives in Vancouver, British

Columbia, has served as a regional coordinator and on the Institute Board and will be visiting and consulting with the friends in Yukon and Northwest Territories. Shirin Nuesslein lives in Peterborough, Ontario, has visited and worked in Nunavut communities and has accompanied the youth from Rankin Inlet in their service. Her focus will be on learning with the Nunavut friends about their reality and its needs. In the year to come, these two friends look forward to connecting and consulting with individuals, institutions and the community during their visits, and to serving and learning at your side. They will also be consulting closely with the Continental Counsellors and also with Auxiliary Board members as they proceed, paying special attention to the movement of youth which is so promising.

God willing, as a result of your efforts and a systematic learning process, by the end of the next Plan, there will be several flourishing programmes of growth, gaining in strength, across these vast and blessed northern territories.

As we approach the centenary of the revelation of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, we recall with joy the Tablet revealed on April 5, 1916 'in which Abdu'l-Bahá shines a bright light on Canada's northern peoples. You know this Tablet well, having achieved the honour of contributing to the fulfilment of His hopes:

> Likewise in the provinces of Canada, such as Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Ungava, Keewatin, Mackenzie, Yukon, and the Franklin Islands in the Arctic Circle – the believers of God must become self-sacrificing and like unto the candles of guidance become ignited in the provinces of Canada. Should they show forth such a magnanimity, it is assured that they will obtain universal divine confirmations, the heavenly cohorts will reinforce them uninterruptedly, and a most great victory will be obtained. God willing, the call of the Kingdom may reach the ears of the Eskimos, the inhabitants of the Islands of Franklin in the north of Canada, as well as Greenland. Should the fire of the love of God be kindled in Greenland, all the ice of that country will be melted, and its cold weather become temperate – that is, if the hearts be touched with the heat of the love of God, that territory will become a divine rose garden and a heavenly paradise, and the souls, even as fruitful trees, will acquire the utmost freshness and beauty. Effort, the utmost effort, is required. Should you display an effort, so that the fragrances of God may be diffused among the Eskimos, its effect will be very great and far-reaching.[1]

We pray that this heat will but increase day by day. As Ms. Nematifar and Ms. Nuesslein journey in your regions, they carry our love.

– The National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

1 Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 25



Youth and junior youth walk towards an igloo in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, to learn about how it was built and its historical significance. The igloo was constructed by an elder with the assistance of some of the youth as part of a service project.

"Igniting the flame of service": Comments at Calgary teaching conference

The following are comments from former member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Mr. Daniel Scott, shared with the friends at a conference held in May in Calgary, Alta. The conference, called "Igniting the Flame of Service," was focused on teaching the Faith. Mr. Scott reflects on the current Five Year Plan and how to strengthen the process of growth in these final months. He also discusses the broader context in which our efforts to serve the Plan are situated.

Dearest friends,

It is such a pleasure to be at this gathering that has drawn so many friends from this cluster together this weekend. This is a remarkable gathering. You have been drawn together by the power of selfless love, the simple strand of love from which all action begins. And faith, faith in an All-Loving God, that He will never abandon humanity which He created out of his boundless love; faith in His Manifestation and in the potency of His Revelation; faith in the potentialities given to every human being; faith in the capacity of humanity to free itself from the fetters of materialism and build a civilization founded on justice and characterized by unity, peace and prosperity, in the fullest sense of the word. Friends, it is our lot to labour and to learn together how to translate the insights, principles and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh—the Ancient Beauty Who has "consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be freed from its bondage"—into reality.[1]

This gathering can best be regarded as a spiritual conference, and I want to thank the Spiritual Assembly of Calgary and the Bahá'í Council of Alberta for their efforts in bringing us together. We have an opportunity today to reflect on the present Plan and to think together about how to strengthen the Cause in Calgary during these last months of the present Five Year Plan. This morning I will try to raise a few points about the broad context of our efforts.

With the appearance of a Manifestation, a burst of spiritual energy is released and a new Revelation is brought to humanity. In his book *Revelation and Social Reality*, Paul Lample writes that the Revelation "upsets the equilibrium of the old social order. It unites the hearts and minds of those who recognize it and thus forges a new community. From within that community must emerge a consciousness that can decipher and a capacity that can apply the new teachings in order to make the world a different place."[2]

It is breathtaking to contemplate what we are labouring consciously to achieve. We visualize, the best we can, a world in which justice and fairness are the foundation of human affairs—when, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "Matters have come to such a pass that the people of the world have grown accustomed to iniquity and flee from fair-mindedness."[3] We strive to envision a world



A group of friends study Unit 1 of Book 9: *Gaining an Historical Perspective*, in Winnipeg, Man. Photo: Zachary Miloff

characterized by unity; the Blessed Beauty observed, "No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union."[4]

Transformation of the individual and society

Achieving the vision of Bahá'u'lláh requires the transformation of the individual and of society. Transformation is a word which is often used too casually. It conveys a profound meaning. Think of an example of physical transformation. One that often comes to mind is that of a caterpillar to a butterfly—a complete change in appearance and form, endowing the creature with new capacity, for previously it was confined to crawl slowly on the surface of the earth and afterwards it can fly above it with grace and beauty. Such a transformation is now underway in the life of the individual—from which will emerge "a new race of men … incomparable in character,"[5]—and the life of society, which is advancing toward a new civilization, one truly reflective of the oneness of humankind. This is a dual transformation: the development of the individual and the development of society are interrelated and inseparable.

To contribute to an ever-advancing civilization as envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh, we need to be imbued with a strong sense of purpose that impels us to struggle to transform ourselves and to contribute to the transformation of society. On a personal level, this involves struggling to develop our vast potentialities, the spiritual qualities and faculties with which we have been endowed by an All-Loving Creator. On a societal level, we strive to promote the welfare of the human race and to transform the structures of society. These aspects of what is being called a two-fold moral purpose are inseparable: the standards and behavior of individuals shape their environment and in turn individuals are molded by social structures and processes:

> We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.[6]

In a recent message, the Universal House of Justice called on us to reflect on the profound nature of this dual transformation:

> Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. "Is not the object of every Revelation," He Himself proclaims, "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?" The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.[7]

At the centre of our community-building endeavour, then, is learning to apply the Word of God to our individual and collective lives.

The spiritual and material nature of human progress

One of the themes 'Abdu'l-Bahá explored in His many talks was the nature of human progress. He helped us to understand that "Progress is of two kinds, material and spiritual,"[8] and that "only by improving spiritually as well as materially can we make any real progress and become perfect beings."[9] No doubt many factors contribute to human progress, but we will all agree that knowledge is critical. Think of an example from the material world. What would happen if we forgot all we knew about large-scale agriculture and the technologies to transport, store and distribute food? Within a few days there would be a crisis in our cities. There may be some chaos for a while, but in time we can assume that people would go out to the countryside, settle on a piece of land, and learn how to farm. Within a few weeks, our civilization would look very much like one based on subsistence farming. We can appreciate, then, that the chief force propelling civilization is knowledge. A tremendous amount of knowledge about the material world has been generated and applied. But to ensure true civilization emerges we must also generate and apply knowledge about the spiritual aspects of civilization. At the centre of our community-building endeavour, then, is learning to apply the Word of God

to our individual and collective lives. As we do so, we generate knowledge about spiritual reality.

> "Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity."
>
> 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 291.

The Word of God: "Translating that which hath been written into reality and action"

The Word of God is the Creative Word. It is called the Creative Word because it is the "medium of celestial power"[10] and it has the power to create, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals."[11] In another passage, He tells us that "Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity."[12]

If we think about the present global Plan outlined by the House of Justice, at the heart of our efforts is providing an ever-increasing number of people with meaningful access to the Word of God. However, it is not mere access to the Word of God, for Bahá'u'lláh also states that "reading, without understanding, is of no abiding profit unto man."[13] Then we must go beyond simply sharing the Word of God to helping all—our family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and even those regarded as strangers—engage with it, to study and reflect on it—in such a manner as to help all advance in understanding His Revelation. And yet we still must do more, for Bahá'u'lláh also counsels: "It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action."[14]



A Book 1 study circle in Calgary, Alta. Photo: Zachary Miloff

As the people of our communities have the opportunity to interact meaningfully with the Word of God, it penetrates their hearts and minds, it illumines their being, it creates within them spiritual susceptibilities and spiritual perception, it creates mindfulness and intelligence, it generates volition—the will to act, to struggle and strive to become more than what we are and to build a better civilization. The roots of human motivation go deep into our higher nature; it is our spiritual nature that generates the motivation needed for sustained action. Think for a moment of a cow. If you were to observe a herd for a while and write down all that each cow does, would it not be a short list? For a cow does only what is necessary to meet its immediate physical needs; this is about as far as the motivation of our lower nature can take us. It is our higher, our spiritual nature, that generates the will necessary to labour to transform. As Mr. Lample wrote in *Revelation and Social Reality*: "It is attraction to God and the love of Bahá'u'lláh that gives us the strength to exercise control over our conduct, to properly apply divine principles and laws, to subdue the ego and work in harmony with others. And when we inevitably fail to meet the mark at a given stage of development, it is our love for Bahá'u'lláh that helps us forgive each other and forget the past, demonstrate tolerance and love, and pick ourselves up, heal our wounds and renew our collective efforts."[15]

Establishing new patterns of community life

To return to our theme, if we think about the four core activities that the House of Justice has defined, that are placed squarely at the centre of the Plan, each is concerned primarily with creating a space and means for people to interact with the Word of God in a meaningful manner, and to learn how, in very practical terms, to translate that Word into reality and action. Core activities are about developing the potentialities latent in the human soul and establishing new patterns of life—individual and collective—conducive to ensuring spiritual and material progress go hand

in hand. The framework of the Plan encourages an ongoing pattern of action, reflection on action, consultation and study that helps us to learn and promote learning.

The Institute enables each generation to build on the accomplishments and learning of the past, enabling more and more people to walk a path of service together.

In each of these activities, we are striving to both apply what we have learned from the decades of endeavour of Bahá'í communities around the globe, and to learn further, to gain more insights into building a civilization in which the material and spiritual are joined and advance together. In each children's class, we are learning how to nurture the spiritual susceptibilities of a child, helping him or her to lay the foundations of an upright and praiseworthy character and providing fundamental knowledge of the Revelation. In each junior youth group, we are learning to assist young adolescents to navigate a challenging period of life, assisting them to strengthen their powers of expression and their ability to reason morally and encouraging them to dedicate their increasing spiritual and intellectual powers to the betterment of their communities. Devotional gatherings help all to appreciate the intimate connection of worship and service, nurturing within children, youth and adults an appreciation of the sacred and assisting us to cultivate an attitude of reverence. These gatherings strengthen the roots of the Faith in a community and draw people together in a common purpose and fortify our unity. In a society in which the forces of materialism and individualism are so strong, such gatherings help us maintain awareness of the sacred, without which we can become careless with one another.

The Bahá'í community has been learning about these areas of endeavour for generations. Much of this learning is now recorded in the books of the Institute, which serve as a record of the insights we have gained in these specific endeavours, in the development of the community as a whole, and in the work of teaching the Cause. The Institute enables each generation to build on the accomplishments and learning of the past, enabling more and more people to walk a path of service together. The study circle provides an environment for the systematic study of the Creative Word, in an environment that is "serious and uplifting"[16] and an atmosphere of mutual support and assistance, where the commitment to learning finds expression in a willingness to accompany others in their endeavours.

The more people involved in these activities, the more knowledge will be generated. As we call on others in the wider community, enter into purposeful discussion of themes of spiritual import, deepen their knowledge of the Faith and share Bahá'u'lláh's message, we are welcoming increasing numbers to join us in a mighty spiritual enterprise destined to culminate in the emergence of a new race of men and "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."[17]



A junior youth group studies *Breezes of Confirmation* in Winnipeg, Man. Photo: Zachary Miloff

Engaging people with the Word of God is a profoundly spiritual and sacred act involving the heart of a human being, a heart which belongs to God, and the Revelation. It is first and foremost an act of spiritual empowerment. It is about raising consciousness.

As we establish core activities, they become points of unity in a community and we have found that each activity supports the others. For example, parents who first bring their children to a children's class are invited to a devotional gathering. After some time they begin to participate in a study circle, and after a little more time, hold their own devotional gatherings. An individual is invited to a study circle and after some time begins a children's class. Gradually a pattern of activity, centred on applying the Word of God, is woven in the community, often at the level of a neighbourhood, a small geographic area where people can generally walk to activities.

Yet, it is not only in the context of a neighbourhood that the work of teaching and community building needs to be focused: we need to draw people into contact with the Word of God to influence thought and action, in every social space. In our families, our professions and occupations, in everyday interactions, in our networks of friends, in all of the settings in which we move there are people open to the exploration of spiritual matters. As we engage people in every walk of life—with the example of the Master always in view—study with them and serve alongside them, the bonds of friendship are strengthened and the influence of the Word of God increases.

Teaching the Cause

All of this work of community building is propelled by the work of teaching the Cause. So important is this work of teaching for our own individual spiritual growth and the transformation of society that Bahá'u'lláh made it a law and described it as the crown of all deeds.[18] Engaging people with the Word of God is a profoundly spiritual and sacred act involving the heart of a human being, a heart which belongs to God, and the Revelation. It is first and foremost an act of spiritual empowerment. It is about raising consciousness. It is engagement with the Word of God that removes the clay on the wings of a bird—the bird of the human heart—burns away the apathy, and endows the bird with the conviction and confidence to rise above oppression and to soar.

Imagine for a moment that you move into a new neighbourhood and one afternoon you see your neighbour sitting on a bench outside his house. You take some time and go over and visit him. He is quite friendly, and over the next few months you come to know him and his family well. Among many things you learn that he and everyone in his family believe the world is flat, and that if anyone ventures more than a few blocks from the neighbourhood he or she will fall off the edge of the world into oblivion. So he has lived his life confined to a few city blocks around his home. Now, as you become friends, building trust and confidence, little by little you advance some arguments to help him think about the possibility that the world is round and not flat. Over the months since you moved into your new home, you and your friend have taken walks around the neighbourhood. One night you walk a little further than previously, just one street, and he walks with you. You walk another block, and then another. Your friend, while nervous, trusts you and has thought long and hard about the things you have said about the world being round. Unknown to you, he has discussed this matter with his wife many times. You both go another block, and then another, and he stops, realizing that the world is not flat but indeed round—that what he had been brought up to believe all his life was not accurate. At that moment, he is free. Free to venture forth, to see things and meet people, to learn things never before possible while he was confined to the area around his home. You have given him a gift that is priceless. This is an analogy to the physical world that helps us to think about the nature of teaching the Cause, of sharing and exploring with others knowledge of the spiritual dimension of human life.

An important ability we must cultivate is to perceive strength so that we can work to contribute to it. While we need to be conscious of weaknesses, we cannot build on these. From its inception, the Cause has gone from strength to strength; it will always be so.

Universal participation and maintaining a vision of the whole

Friends, everyone is needed in the work of bringing forth this wondrous civilization Bahá'u'lláh described. The work to build this civilization is, as the Universal House of Justice described, infinitely complex and will take generations to bring into being. No mind can possibly grasp the magnitude of the work ahead for humanity. There is so much that needs to be learned; so much capacity needs to be developed in each of the three protagonists of civilization: the individual, the institutions and the community. If, for a period of time, we need to focus on one area or one element of the work in order to learn and to build certain capacity, this does not mean that other areas or elements are of less value or less necessary. The focus in the previous Plan on certain clusters so that we could learn about the path of teaching and community building was never intended to suggest that other clusters, that all clusters, were not a part of the process or not important: the learning of the friends in every cluster contributes to the whole and the whole, in turn, lends assistance to each cluster. Labour in every place is needed—indeed is essential. That for a while there was focus placed on helping establish and understand the functioning of certain new agencies—institute coordinators and Area Teaching Committees—could never have meant that Local Spiritual Assemblies were no longer valuable and would not meaningfully contribute to the work of expansion and consolidation. The focus on junior youth and youth in this present Plan, to learn how to engage this receptive population, to help them to navigate a crucial stage in their life, and ensure that the learning of one generation is passed to the next, should not in any way convey a sense that the active participation of all—adults, youth and children—is not necessary; or that the work of adults is only to support the work of youth. How could we demonstrate the potency of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to build vibrant, spiritually charged communities striving toward unity if everyone were not included, if each person was not called upon and encouraged to contribute their share to the work?

A challenge we face at all times is to maintain a vision of the whole and to build capacity to advance multiple lines of action at the same time. If in the future there is a need to learn about another element of the spiritual enterprise, we will not stop all the other things we are doing. We need look always to build on the accomplishments that have been made. Is this not what the messages of the House of Justice have called on us to do? In each Plan the House of Justice has mentioned that firesides are a way of teaching, these have not been discarded and replaced with new approaches. The importance of Local Spiritual Assemblies and their role in the Plan likewise has been addressed in each Plan.

An important ability we must cultivate is to perceive strength so that we can work to contribute to it. While we need to be conscious of weaknesses, we cannot build on these. From its inception, the Cause has gone from strength to strength; it will always be so. Friends, there is tremendous strength in every one of our communities and here in Calgary there are tremendous opportunities. The task in this next year is to recognize and endeavour to build on these strengths. I look forward to hearing your reflections and learning of your plans.

1 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 45.
2 Paul Lample, *Revelation and Social Reality*, 2009, p. v.
3 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 32.
4 Bahá'ulláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 112.
5 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 31.
Shoghi Effendi, in the *Advent of Divine Justice*, confirms that "the supreme and distinguishing function" of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is "none other than the calling into being of a new race of men." In *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, he asks: "Who can measure the heights to which human intelligence, liberated from its shackles, will soar? Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover?" Quoting Bahá'u'lláh in the *Advent of Divine Justice*, the Guardian writes: "'A race of men, incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay.'"
6 Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1933, *Compilation on Social and Economic Development*, p. 4.
7 The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.
8 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith* - 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Section, p. 226.
9 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 62.
10 The Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 10 July 1989.
11 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 246.
12 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 103.
13 Baha'u'llah, *The Kitáb-Íqán*, p. 172.
14 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 117.
15 Paul Lample, *Revelation and Social Reality*, p. vii.
16 The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2008
"Thousands upon thousands, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in systematic study of the Creative Word in an environment that is at once serious and uplifting. As they strive to apply through a process of action, reflection and consultation the insights thus gained, they see their capacity to serve the Cause rise to new levels. Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, they carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. As they call on one another in their homes and pay visits to families, friends and acquaintances, they enter into purposeful discussion on themes of spiritual import, deepen their knowledge of the Faith, share Bahá'u'lláh's message, and welcome increasing numbers to join them in a mighty spiritual enterprise. Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they extend their efforts widely to involve ever-growing contingents of participants in classes that become centres of attraction for the young and strengthen the roots of the Faith in society. They assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. And with the advantage of a greater abundance of human resources, an increasing number of them are able to express their faith through a rising tide of endeavours that address the needs of humanity in both their spiritual and material dimensions. Such is the panorama before us as we pause this Riḍván to observe the progress of the worldwide Bahá'í community."
17 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 42.
18 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 75.

Advancing to a stronger position

Inspiration for this issue is drawn, in part, from the recent Riḍván 2015 message. Some of the stories, both historic and current, explore what emerges from inauspicious beginnings. Other stories examine the importance of having hope, of how capacity is gradually built and progress achieved, and the abiding sense of joy that surrounds it all.

In the fifth paragraph of the Riḍván 2015 message to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Universal House of Justice writes:

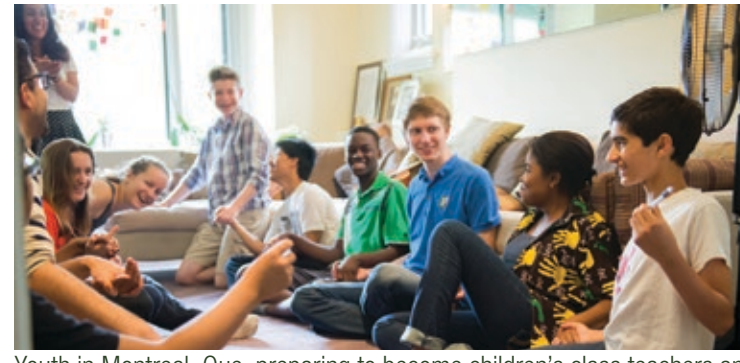
> We wish to address some additional words to those of you in whose surroundings marked progress is yet to occur and who long for change. Have hope. It will not always be so. Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers—young or old—or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes? Do not imagine that your own case is inherently any different. Change in a cluster, be it swift or hard won, flows neither from a formulaic approach nor from random activity; it proceeds to the rhythm of action, reflection, and consultation, and is propelled by plans that are the fruit of experience. Beyond this, and whatever its immediate effects, service to the Beloved is, in itself, a source of abiding joy to the spirit. Take heart, too, from the example of your spiritual kin in the Cradle of the Faith, how their constructive outlook, their resilience as a community, and their steadfastness in promoting the Divine Word are bringing about change in their society at the level of thought and deed. God is with you, with each of you. In the twelve months that remain of the Plan, let every community advance from its present position to a stronger one.

The entire Riḍván 2015 message, received and distributed earlier this year, is included in this issue for your ease of reference.

Upcoming issue of *Bahá'í Canada*: Commemoration of Twin Holy Birthdays

The Winter 2016 issue of *Bahá'í Canada* will include a special feature on the commemoration of the Twin Holy Birthdays, which will occur on 10 and 11 Qudrat 172, corresponding to 13 and 14 November 2015 in the Gregorian calendar. We are eager to receive accounts and photographs from communities and neighbourhoods across Canada, in light of this statement from a recent letter from the Universal House of Justice:

"The friends should regard the Twin Festivals as a sacred moment to gather and strengthen the devotional and social life of the community and as a priceless opportunity to reach out to friends, family, and the wider society and share with them the significance of the lives and missions of these two most precious Beings."



Youth in Montreal, Que. preparing to become children's class teachers and junior youth group animators take a break from their study to play a game.



Youth at an institute campaign for Book 3 and Book 5 in Montreal, Que. make friendship bracelets. Photos: Zachary Miloff

From the history of the Bahá'í Faith

"Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers—young or old—or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes?" The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2015.

Leonora Stirling Holsapple – "Herald of the Kingdom"

Responding to the call of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Leonora Stirling Holsapple left her home in New York and pioneered to Brazil. She remained there for 60 years until her passing, working tirelessly through "loneliness, meager means, malnutrition and illness" to "spread the Light of God in this day" to the entire South American continent.



Leonora Stirling circa 1920.
Photo: *The Bahá'í World 1979-1983*

Rio de Janeiro: At dawn on 1 February 1921, the S.S. Vasari plowed through sparkling waters into the majestic harbour. Below deck, in second-class accommodation, watching, stood an attractive, cultured young woman, a lone American. In her heart she nourished the vision of an unspeakably glorious mission, the spread of the Light of God in this day to an entire continent. In her purse, all her savings, barely enough for two weeks' modest expenses. No friends in the city, no job. She spoke no Portuguese. Odd circumstances for one who so readily confessed a lack of self-confidence. Clearly her reliance was placed elsewhere.

Panama City: Half a century later at an international conference held in connection with the dedication of the first Bahá'í house of Worship in Latin America, this same slight and soft-spoken woman—Leonora Stirling Armstrong—was presented to the thousands of believers gathered there. Spontaneously they rose to pay tribute to her achievements. What emotions must have surged within her weakened frame, now bent with long toil, as she surveyed these children of her dream. For here were fervent followers of Bahá'u'lláh raised up from every country of Latin America, of every color, clime and custom. Here was her vision made real; like Saint Peter she cast the seeds, and now witnessed a heavenly harvest. Heartbreaks and anxiety; aches, pains and fevers—how they all took on divine meaning.

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On 23 June 1895, in a pleasant two-story house, high on a rise overlooking the Hudson River and the Catskill range beyond, a first child was born to Samuel Norris Holsapple and his beautiful wife, Grace Stirling. They named her Leonora. The Holsapples were well-known in the then little town of Hudson, New York, where they had settled after their marriage. The gifted Mrs. Holsapple served actively in civic work, and had taught school. The childhood of Leonora was, however, soon overshadowed with tragedy and sadness, for her mother's health steadily declined. Just after her precious daughter's fifth birthday she died.

Mrs. Holslapple's untimely death had a profound effect on Leonora and her younger sister, Alethe. They never again had what could truly be called a home. "How we could endure," Leonora herself recounts, "through those years of our childhood and adolescence, such loneliness, such suffering, even cruelty, I do not know … I can remember how when still a small child, often at night before going to bed, I knelt down at my sister's bedside and in agony of soul, implored God with all the intensity of my being to let us feel His Presence, His nearness, His protection. Little did I then dream in what way, and how specifically, that prayer was later to be answered!"[1]

… Though she attended church from an early age, Leonora was somewhat disillusioned by what she experienced there. When she was about thirteen her maternal grandmother, 'Mother Stirling,' who had by then after long years of spiritual searching found and embraced the Bahá'í Faith, first began to teach her granddaughters the truths of the New Day. The example of Mother Stirling's devotion and many efforts to spread the Bahá'í teachings made a lasting impression on Leonora's sensitive nature. She was greatly attracted to the new Revelation and began to memorize passages and prayers from the Writings. Already at that time she made her own efforts to share the Message with her classmates and friends.

After graduation from college she taught Latin in high schools and was active in social work as her mother and grandmother had been before her. During this period she came in close contact with a number of prominent early believers, among them the Obers and, in particular, May Maxwell. "May, more than anyone else, helped me to feel the great love of Bahá'u'lláh and

'Abdu'l-Bahá, the reality of love, which I had longed to feel, and a deep bond was formed between us, which gave me the greatest joy I had known."[2] Others, too, such as Roy Wilhelm and the Kinneys, inspired her with their immense devotion to the Faith.

The desire to pioneer first stirred in Leonora's soul when 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were unveiled at the Bahá'í Convention held in New York in 1919. Spontaneously, and at once, she wrote to the Master, offering herself in service. "Thou hadst," was His reply, "expressed thy great wish to be of service to the Divine Threshold and to heal the infirm with the Divine Panacea—the infirm who is afflicted with passion and self. Spiritual malady is more severe than physical illness for it may be that the latter may be converted by the least remedy into health and vigor, while the former will not be cured by a thousand well-known remedies … My hope is that thou mayest become a spiritual physician."[3]

As Leonora recounts it: "This hope of the Master's became my highest aspiration and when, early in 1920, I read His Tablet to Martha Root, commending her teaching work in South America and stressing the importance of its being followed up by others, it at once seemed to me that here there might be a definite task for me. A letter to Martha brought an immediate reply, with all encouragement."[4] Martha Root had opened South America with her historic visit there in 1919. Her response to Leonora was whole-hearted. She shared thrilling accounts of her experiences and gave her young recruit a copy of her own diary notes from that period. Brazil was finally decided on as the best place to go first.

The grave concerns of relatives and friends alike now assailed her: to expose herself to the dangers and rigors of such a far-off country, much of it a jungle, alone, friendless, and without knowledge of the language—why it was nothing less than foolhardy! "I felt my resolution weakening, when some social work in the northern part of New York State gave me the sudden idea to slip up to Montreal to consult May Maxwell. Although ill, May, on hearing the situation, sat upright in bed and in ringing tones which still vibrate in my memory, said, 'Leonora, what are you waiting for? Go!'

"'I will take the next boat,' I replied."[5]

And so it was that on 15 January 1921 she set sail from New York on a divine adventure destined to span no less than sixty years. In doing so, she became one of a handful of valiant souls who arose in response to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call during His Own lifetime, and the first Bahá'í pioneer to settle permanently in Latin America.

Had not the Master promised confirmation to those souls who, like unto Peter and Paul, would journey to South America with the requisite qualities of "perfect severance, devotion, firmness and steadfastness in the Covenant"?[6] Leonora knew this meant severance "from dearest friends, comforts, profession, from everything …."[7] Martha Root had herself impressed this upon her. And now she was to be surrounded and sustained by such divine confirmations.

Leonora's original intention had been to proceed from Rio to Bahia, the northeastern city mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*—the only city so blessed in the southern hemisphere. But the way opened shortly after her arrival in Rio to teach the Faith in Santos to the south. There she stayed with a family who, in a letter to Martha Root, had expressed interest in knowing more about the Faith. Her quarters were very humble but it was a start.

Life in her land of spiritual adoption was never easy. She often suffered from loneliness, meager means, malnutrition and illness. Gradually as she became proficient in the Portuguese language, she was better able to support herself. Still, it required long working hours, sometimes at several jobs just to keep body and soul together. She found teaching English, which was the main avenue open to her, to be a valuable way of meeting people and interesting them in the Faith.

Just three months after settling in Santos, Leonora learned of the loss of her beloved grandmother, the spiritual mother of her heart. Later that same year a profounder grief overtook her when news came of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She had so intensely longed to meet Him in this life. Providentially, from Bahjí in June 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had revealed a second tablet for her. This Tablet became a source of great comfort to her not only in that time of tragedy but throughout the long years ahead. The Master had addressed the envelope simply: "Brazil. To the Maidservant of God, Leonora Stirling Holsapple." Amazingly it reached her, as the Master no doubt knew it would. In the text He refers to Leonora as a "Herald of the Kingdom," calls upon her to "thank God that thou hast enlightened thy sight, and art giving light to the sight of others, too," refers by name to a number of seekers, and promises that "the intoxicated friends will grow "in rapture and ecstasy, begin to break into melodies and harmonies and raise such a tune that will reach the Supreme Concourse and rejoice and exhilarate the holy ones." He, likewise, advises her to say that "the entering into this Divine Cause is accompanied by everlasting honour and eternal sovereignty."[8]

"Soon the beloved Guardian's messages began to reach me, urging me never to become discouraged, rather to redouble my efforts, and guiding me with his unfailing wisdom."[9] Indeed, throughout his ministry Shoghi Effendi's esteem for her and her services was clearly evident. His love for her and his warm encouragement of her work lasted till the end of his life and are recorded in the tender words he addressed to her in many letters: "I feel deeply attached to your work."[10] "Your name I assure you will adorn the annals of the Cause and will inspire many a Bahá'í pioneer

in the future. You cannot realize the splendour and significance of the work you are doing at present."[11] "I will pray that you may be guided and fortified by the spirit of our beloved Master Who I am sure is guiding you, watching over you and sustaining you in your labours. Persevere and never lose heart."[12]

A survey of Leonora [Holsapple's] tireless pioneer activities must necessarily span six decades of continual service. Her achievements marked a high tide of human endeavour. Whether in her constant teaching of individuals, her historic travels, the publicity she garnered for the Cause wherever she went, her herculean labour of translating, publishing and disseminating Bahá'í literature both in Portuguese and Spanish, her work in spreading the Message through correspondence, or eventual material contributions to the community, she stands out eminently distinguished. Through the years she also engaged in social service whenever possible, and became known in the press as the 'Nurse of the Poor'.

– Hooper C. Dunbar, *The Bahá'í World 1979 – 1983*, pp. 733 – 735.

1 Unpublished memoirs.
2 Ibid.
3 Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í International Archives.
4 Unpublished memoirs.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Tablet of 'Adbu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í International Archives.
9 Unpublished memoirs.
10 From a handwritten postscript of Shoghi Effendi to a letter written to Leonora Holsapple, 30 July 1932.
11 From a handwritten postscript of Shoghi Effendi to a letter written to Leonora Holsapple, 18 August 1927.
12 From a handwritten postscript of Shoghi Effendi to a letter written to Leonora Holsapple, 5 April 1930.

Sowing the seeds of faith in the Faroe Islands: The Story of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Eskil Ljungberg

In its Riḍván message of 2015, the beloved Universal House of Justice addresses those "in whose surroundings marked progress is yet to occur and who long for change." The House of Justice encourages these friends to, quite simply, "have hope," and then raises this compelling point: "Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers—young or old—or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes?"

One such case is a Swedish man who embraced the Faith at the age of 61. He was truly a lone soul in an inhospitable clime for most of his life as a follower of Bahá'u'lláh, and drew strength from the power of divine assistance.

At Eskil's death on 26 February 1985, the Universal House of Justice wrote the following about his life, which speaks to both the challenges he encountered and the spiritual qualities he demonstrated:

> PASSING DEARLY LOVED STEADFAST VALIANT KNIGHT BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ESKIL LJUNGBERG BRINGS CLOSE EXEMPLARY LIFE DEDICATION FORTITUDE SINGLEMINDED DEVOTION BLESSED BEAUTY. HE STAYED AT HIS POST MEETING EVERY OPPOSITION WITH LOVE AND PATIENCE WINNING HEARTS AND LAYING SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION CAUSE GOD FAROE ISLANDS.

Eskil Englebert Joachim Ljungberg was born on 20 May 1886 in Filipstad, Sweden. Before the outbreak of World War I, Eskil made his way to England and found employment with an aristocratic family outside London. Overwhelmed and no doubt abashed by his abrupt encounter with aristocratic mores and customs, he gallantly persisted in learning the ins and outs of English manners and the intricacies of a well-laid table. According to his letters and unpublished memoirs, he embraced England with his whole heart and became the epitome of the English gentleman, refined in his manners and impeccably courteous. He began his 30-year career during the opening salvos of World War I and continued to work in London during the upheavals of the Great Depression and the cataclysmic events of World War II. With characteristic understatement, he notes he lived in London during "a very trying time."



Eskil Ljungberg took many trips to Iceland and contributed to the development of the Faith there.

In his spare time, Eskil would study his favourite subject, religion, in the reading rooms of the British



Eskil Ljungberg with a child named after him.

Museum. Although Eskil did not hear directly about the Faith while in London, he wrote of one curious encounter. He was walking in a garden with his fiancée and they saw a distinguished-looking lady. His fiancée told him that she was an aunt who was probably "a bit crazy," because she had "fallen in love" with an old Persian gentlemen who lived in the Holy Land. Eskil's fiancée died before they could be married; the lady was Lady Blomfield, a well-known Bahá'í.

It was not until he returned to Sweden that Eskil discovered the Faith. Out for a walk one early summer day, Eskil met an older Swedish woman who had spent most of her life in the United States. Jennie Ottilia Anderson had returned to Sweden to share the Message of Bahá'u'lláh with her fellow countrymen. Their first encounter was brief, but throughout his summer holiday in the country, he continued to think about the Faith. Upon his return to Stockholm, Eskil agreed to meet with his newfound friend to learn more about Bahá'u'lláh and the importance of His mission for all humanity. Eskil sat absorbed for hours as he listened, and this time, all became "clear." Eskil "at once" announced his belief in Bahá'u'lláh. In his unpublished autobiography, Eskil states that it was the Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker, who was in Stockholm at the time he declared his belief in Bahá'u'lláh, who received him into the Faith, anointing his face and hands with attar of roses. This was an unforgettable event for Eskil. It was the fall of 1947.

Eskil began to study the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith with Mrs. Anderson and others. The days and years went by. Eskil served on the newly formed Spiritual Assemblies of Stockholm, and later, Gothenburg. The turning point in his life occurred at the International Bahá'í Conference in Stockholm in July 1953. Eskil often told the story of how, when the call came for individuals to journey to other countries to share the message of Bahá'u'lláh with others, he felt he was literally pushed by invisible hands to volunteer.

"I wanted to go to a warm place," Eskil relates in his memoirs. As early as 1949, he had decided to pioneer to Casa Blanca and this move had received the approval of Shoghi Effendi. The plan did not materialize, and later on Eskil considered going to the Canary Islands. However, as so often happens with plans that seem sensible and well-conceived, instead of going to a warm place, Eskil went to a subarctic region, the Faroe Islands. The Faroes, originally a Danish colony, is a group of islands in the North Atlantic, between Iceland and Scotland.

Within a month of pledging to venture to the Faroe Islands, Eskil succeeded in selling off all his belongings, including his beloved antique furniture. With but a few battered suitcases, Eskil set sail again from Sweden on a ship bound for a foreign land. He arrived in the Faroe Islands in late August 1953. He was 67 years of age. For becoming the first Bahá'í to settle in the Faroe Islands, he received from Shoghi Effendi the honorific "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh," and when he arrived, he was welcomed by a letter informing him of a message that Shoghi Effendi had asked to be conveyed to him: "Assure Ljungberg appreciation, prayers." In a subsequent letter, Shoghi Effendi again showered Eskil with words of encouragement and appreciation.

It must have been quite a shock for someone who had known nothing but cultured surroundings and joyful Bahá'í gatherings to come to what must have seemed such a desolate spot in the North Atlantic. Eskil arrived in the Faroe Islands on a Thursday morning in the midst of a rainstorm—a weeklong rainstorm, he noted. As all the hotels were full, he found lodging for the night in an ancillary building of the Hotel Hafnia in a "tiny room" as big as a "cupboard," but "spotlessly clean," he related. The next day he obtained a regular room at the Hotel Hafnia, which was to remain his home for the first nine months of his some 32 years in the Faroe Islands.

Eventually, people came forward and offered to help Eskil locate housing. He found a small apartment and slowly but surely began to reach out to the people of the Faroe Islands. Eskil tried patiently and prayerfully to sow the seeds of faith among the Faroese. It was challenging at first. Eskil's stately bearing and refined manners did not accord with the customs and habits of the Faroese. Many Faroese were suspicious of him and suspected him of being a spy. However, eventually, others found him intriguing and were willing to talk to him, although they were not overtly willing to embrace the new religion he followed. During these early years in the Faroe Islands, he received a few visitors, but for the most part he spent his time chatting with the old men of Tórshavn, the

capital city of the Faroe Islands. He also engaged in a prodigious correspondence with Bahá'ís from around the world and translated some of the Bahá'í Writings into Swedish. He took several trips to Iceland, some at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, and helped teach the Faith to many of the first believers there, as well as acquaint many prominent Icelanders with the teachings of the Faith.

His daily life revolved around prayer. Rising at 5 a.m. each day, he would recite his prayers, repeating these supplications at noon. He drew on a vast reservoir of spiritual joy, happiness and enthusiasm.

Eventually, in 1965, 12 years after Eskil's arrival in the Faroe Islands, the first Faroese expressed an understanding of the significance of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and began to study with Eskil. By this time Eskil had moved to Niels Finsensgøta 46, to the ground floor apartment that he would occupy until his death. This was the site of many dinners and high teas. His loving nature, his sense of humour and his spiritual strength were magnetic. By now he had become less a stranger and more a trusted and revered uncle to many of his Faroese friends. He was known among the populace as the "venerable old Bahá'í." One family even named one of their sons in honour of Eskil. Other Bahá'ís began to arrive for short or extended stays and the vestiges of a Bahá'í community began to appear. The depth of his spiritual patience, coupled with his unbridled joy and enthusiasm, was a source of great strength to the fledgling Bahá'í community that was emerging in the Faroe Islands during these early years.

Eventually, in April 1973, the first Spiritual Assembly was formed in Tórshavn. He considered this to be a crowning event of his life in the Faroe Islands. With the advantage of hindsight, one can see the parallels between these "marvellous results" achieved at the time, to the ongoing efforts of the friends all over the world to establish programs of growth. And one can only imagine how much hope Eskil had, how much he relied on the power of divine assistance during the preceding 20 years. As the Universal House of Justice wrote of Eskil: "HE STAYED AT HIS POST MEETING EVERY OPPOSITION WITH LOVE AND PATIENCE WINNING HEARTS AND LAYING SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION CAUSE GOD FAROE ISLANDS."

Even as his physical body began at last to fail him, his mind remained alert and focused on bringing joy to others. On 23 February 1985, at the age of 98, the soul of Eskil took flight. Friends who sat with him during his last hours describe their impression of his being received into the Abhá Kingdom by strong and loving hands. Shortly thereafter, the precious physical remains of Eskil Ljungberg were buried in the rocky soil of the Faroe Islands on the outskirts of Tórshavn. Eskil has served the Faith in the Faroe Islands for almost 32 years, all that time manifesting exemplary devotion, patience and steadfastness.

Bahá'u'lláh has written:

> I swear by Him Who is the truth! Erelong will God adorn the beginning of the Book of Existence with the mention of His loved ones who have suffered tribulation in His path, and journeyed through the countries in His name and for His praise. Whoso hath attained their presence will glory in their meeting, and all that dwell in every land will be illumined by their memory.[1]

– Based on articles written by Edvard T. Jonsson, Michael Paul Reveal and Roy Philbrow

1 Qtd. in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 83.

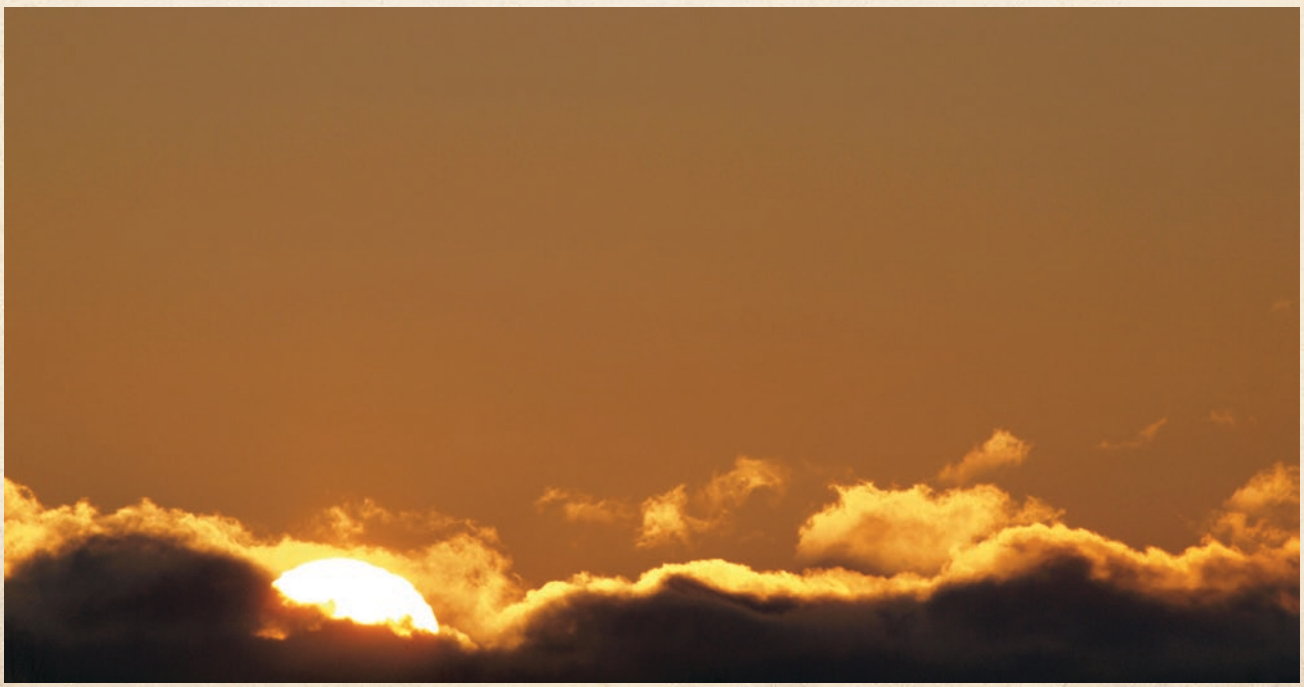


Photo: Don Long

Reflecting on guidance, broadening vision and enhancing action in South Okanagan

This account highlights how the breadth of activity in South Okanagan, a cluster in British Columbia, expanded over the course of a year, as more and more people participated in a space created every three months to study the guidance and reflect. Gerald Morris describes the conditions that helped the friends maintain hope and sustain and expand their efforts.

Twelve months ago there was only one regular core activity in our cluster and that was a monthly devotional meeting. About two months after this, our dear Auxiliary Board member invited the two souls who were organizing and hosting the devotional meeting and another individual to a space to deepen on the process we are engaged in. This inspired another weekly devotional and a Ruhi Book 1 study circle. Starting something usually has bumps along the way, and these activities certainly experienced them. Nevertheless, they have witnessed almost a year of sustained participation.

Three months later, our Auxiliary Board member again invited this group to study messages from the Universal House of Justice regarding the process of growth in our cluster. This time four additional cluster members who were also interested in the core activities attended. Collectively we realized that we were not just holding devotional meetings, but were in reality contributing to the formation of a future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The import of that realization struck us hard and steadied our resolve and commitment. Out of this meeting one of the new couples attending committed to starting Unit 1 of Ruhi Book 8, and later established another weekly devotional meeting in their community.

Another three months later, our Auxiliary Board member once more invited us to a study of guidance from the Universal House of Justice. The numbers of those interested in promoting the core activities expanded once again. Out of this study, our community learned more about the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and better understood the significance of dawn prayers and the idea of creating a culture of devotion. A direct outcome of this enhanced understanding was that the most recently established devotional meeting shifted to morning prayers (followed by pancakes). There are now three devotional meetings in our cluster, each with a slightly different focus.

What about those mysterious confirming forces that are made manifest once we show obedience and commitment? They have been evident. We have had people call the Bahá'í number and later declare their belief in Bahá'u'lláh and become active in implementing the provisions of the Plan. Unexpectedly, three young adults completed the first book of the sequence of courses, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, and



A devotional gathering at the Bahá'í Centre in Winnipeg, Man. Photo: Zachary Miloff

one of them is thinking of starting a children's class. Another group is making initial preparations to begin a junior youth group.

Lessons:

The Universal House of Justice has said "…in the final analysis, it is not technique but unity of thought, consistent action, and dedication to learning which will bring about progress."[1] Again, the Universal House of Justice reminded us in its recent Riḍván message that: "Change in a cluster, be it swift or hard won, flows neither from a formulaic approach nor from random activity; it proceeds to the rhythm of action, reflection, and consultation, and is propelled by plans that are the fruit of experience."[2]

Can't you just feel the excitement and anticipation as we look forward to coming together again with the Auxiliary Board member to study the messages of the Universal House of Justice?

From this same precious Riḍván message we read: "Have hope. It will not always be so. Is not the history of our Faith filled with accounts of inauspicious beginnings but marvellous results? How many times have the deeds of a few believers – young or old – or of a single family, or even of a lone soul, when confirmed by the power of divine assistance, succeeded in cultivating vibrant communities in seemingly inhospitable climes? Do not imagine that your own case is inherently any different."

So what has given us hope, sustained us and is propelling us past our own limiting vision?

- **Gradually broadening the vision of what we are being asked to establish.** This is being accomplished through a humble posture of learning—through a rhythm of action, reflection and consultation facilitated by our Auxiliary Board member.
- **Understanding that we are being asked to build a culture; a culture of devotion, a culture of learning and a culture of service.** This has released a lot of energy that has sustained us. We had been accustomed to holding events, some of short duration, others of longer; but creating a culture is so very different. It has freed us so that we view our successes and trials through an empowering and sustaining framework.
- **Accompanying.** We participate in each other's core activity events; we invite others to them; we encourage each other; we celebrate each other's successes, however small; and yes, we eat pancakes!
- **We are learning to home visit.** At one home visit the host remarked: "You visited me in my home—that must mean you like me!" Another said: "Where did you learn to do this? We're lonely, too!" And another couple stated, "We love having people come and visit. We used to do it all the time. We miss it."
- **Commitment, sustained commitment.** Some have outwardly stated their commitment to supporting certain of the core activities and have backed it up by their actions. Others have not stated it outwardly but you see and feel it in their deep, tenacious and unwavering support.
- **Trust in Bahá'u'lláh, begging for His blessings, trusting in His mercy, anticipating the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, and thankfulness.** And He showers His wondrous confirmations in unexpected ways—ways too many to recount and express our gratitude for in this short story.

– Gerald Morris

1 The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010.
2 The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2015.





Participants at a youth gathering create a poem together on the theme of mutual support and assistance, in Ottawa, Ont.
Photos: Louis Brunet

Spirit of joy generated in a Hamilton neighbourhood reaches the whole community

This story from a recent edition of Reflections on Growth *describes how some of the friends in Hamilton, Ont. took steps to begin a junior youth group in a neighbourhood at the beginning of this Plan in an effort to reinvigorate the process of growth in their cluster. Their initial steps evolved into a dynamic pattern of growth, and the unity fostered among those initial friends extended to the community and the Local Spiritual Assembly.*

With a community of several hundred, the participation of a number of friends from the wider community, and a modest but growing number of activities, Hamilton established an intensive programme of growth in October 2005. Yet, by the beginning of this Plan, the cluster's growth had stalled, and soon the number of core activities began to decline. The cluster agencies were no longer functioning, and the spirit of collective action had weakened. The programme of growth was in need of revitalization.

We were accompanied and encouraged by an Auxiliary Board member, and within a few weeks of first visiting families, a small junior youth group was formed. This brought us excitement, and we planned a junior youth camp for the school break in March.

Beyond significantly increasing the number of participants in the junior youth group, the camp contributed to the unity growing among us, which soon extended to the community and to the Local Spiritual Assembly. In planning for the camp, we realized that we would need to call on the help of others in the community. Not only had we never organized a camp before, the junior youth group was the only one in the neighbourhood and made up entirely of participants from the wider community. We would need help with arts, food, and recreational activities, and the community of Hamilton arose to lend its support. Several members of the Local Assembly spent afternoons at the camp helping with art activities and preparing for the final evening when parents and friends in the neighbourhood would be invited to see some of what the junior youth had done during the week.

After a year of effort, the number of junior youth groups in the neighbourhood grew to four. The children's classes continued, as did the regular devotional gathering, and a study circle formed for the older siblings of the junior youth. The call of the Universal House of Justice for the youth conferences in February 2013 encouraged us to reach out to more



A children's class in Maskwacis, Alta. celebrates their one-year anniversary. A teacher of the class writes: "This year has been awesome, exhausting and full of love and hope. With the help of God and Bahá'u'lláh we will continue to grow in this community."

youth and invite them to participate in the community building process. After the conference there have been a number of institute campaigns involving people from the neighbourhood, who now help animate the groups.

The spirit of joy and enthusiasm from this neighbourhood has reached the entire cluster. It can be seen in the quality of the reflection meetings and in the expressed desire of the friends attending to find ways to contribute to the teaching work throughout the cluster.

– *Reflections on Growth*, No. 35., July 2015.



The National Spiritual Assembly hosts an event in Ottawa, Ont. in late May to honour the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The evening began with a drum ceremony by a residential school survivor.





A film called "The Path Home – Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation," which was commissioned by the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, is presented by the producers at an event in Ottawa, Ont. The film presents reflections of several individuals who suffered from the tragic results of the residential school program. Photos: Tracey Lynne



An animator and a junior youth studying *Glimmerings of Hope*, a junior youth text, in Calgary, Alta.





Family and friends study Book 2: Arising to Serve in Calgary, Alta. Photos: Zachary Miloff



A youth gathering held in Vancouver, B.C.



A children's camp in calgary, Alta. Photo: Zachary Miloff



Children at a commemoration for the martyrdom of the Báb held in Goderich, Ont.



Participants at the Atlantic youth gathering in Halifax, N.S.



Friends help prepare food for the Atlantic youth gathering held in Halifax, N.S.





A children's class in Victoria, B.C. cleans up a local park.



A group of friends in Guelph, Ont. work extensively on the local food bank's vegetable garden. They organized the initiative to commemorate the 9th Day of Riḍván. It spanned several days and local businesses generously contributed to the project.



Friends at this year's Atlantic summer school in Berwick, N.S.



A junior youth group in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood in Montreal, Que. Photo: Zachary Miloff



Photo: Zachary Miloff

"The orientation of my heart"

These reflections by Robert Ngunjiri of Kitchener, Ont. explore the connection between the orientation of one's heart and deriving joy from teaching. They were inspired by the statement of the Universal House of Justice that, "… whatever its immediate effects, service to the Beloved is, in itself, a source of abiding joy to the spirit."[1]

I am thankful to Bahá'u'lláh for the bounty of having recognized Him in my youth. Since I declared my faith in Him, I have been immersed in a flurry of activities. The sometimes feverish pace of my life allows me to appreciate how full of life the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is. In this flurry of activity, I have noticed times when my heart feels so free of self that all I desire is the good pleasure of God. At such times I experience such a profound joy and stillness of soul that words can scarcely describe. At other times, I feel frustrated, irritable and anxious. At such moments I have found prayer to be the only thing that can calm my heart. I have also wondered what it is about the orientation of my heart that allows me to derive joy from teaching.

The teaching project that was launched by our cluster institutions provided me with a wonderful opportunity to obtain insight into this question. My most cherished experience was one Saturday afternoon during which three of us went outreaching together. We were all feeling tired and a little diffident about knocking on people's doors. After spending 15 minutes outside someone's door, we had no choice but to knock lest we seem suspicious. Immediately, someone came to answer. A feeling of deep serenity came over me and I found it easy to communicate with them. I even asked whether I could speak with their mom since the youth we were looking for was not home at the time. From that moment onwards, my lethargy and anxiety became things forgotten. It was particularly hot that afternoon and we had to walk quite far to reach all the houses we wanted, but at the end of the day, each of us left with more energy than we had come with. Two of my friends even made plans to reach out to another youth later.

Reflecting upon that day, I realized that what made the difference for me was the time I spent that morning in prayer and meditating on the Creative Word. In Unit 1 of Book 6, the Ruhi Institute notes that when we teach we are interacting with two sacred things: the human heart and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In the notes to the collaborators, they note that one of the aims of the first unit is to raise consciousness of "the sacred." I have found that prayer raises my consciousness of the sacredness of reality. It helps me to maintain focus on the Beloved and quiets the insistent self. Finally, it provides me with spiritual energy.

At the end of the project, we had a meeting to reflect on what had been accomplished. It was scheduled at 10:00 a.m. For a number of reasons, I was unable to say prayers or read the Writings before going. Also, I arrived just after the prayers. I recall sitting there, but not being present. It was akin to seeing the world in monochrome. I could hear and understand the words but I felt that my heart was not engaged at all. At the end of the day, when I finally had the chance to reflect, something which popped out at me was that I had lost sight of my Beloved.

Looking back at what enabled me to embrace the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, I notice that it was that I could feel the traces of my Beloved in the Writings, prayers and the atmosphere of the community. The Báb instructed His followers to recite the following verse before committing any act:

> Verily I do this for God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of all that is seen and unseen, the Lord of creation.[2]

I have found that the degree to which my innermost thoughts and desires reflect these words is the degree to which I derive joy, peace and strength from service.

– Robert Ngunjiri

1 The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2015.

2 Qtd in Saiedi, N, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, p. 312: "For the Sake of God"
The Báb's most direct discussion of the philosophy of ethical action in the Persian Bayán is found in His explanations of the concept of *lilláh*, which means "for God," abiding by the will of God, or acting for the sake of God, and which refers to the inner motivation of action. The Persian Bayán repeatedly commands that all actions must be performed "for God." This motive of action is the same as contentment with divine good pleasure and attaining true annihilation of self before God. As we saw in the Báb's universal imperative, one must be for God and for the creatures of God just as God is for God (for Himself), and for His creatures. The perspective of unity renders the meaning of these two principles one and the same: an action that is truly for God is simultaneously an action for the creatures. All deeds are acceptable if they are performed to attain the good pleasure of God. In the gate entitled "On the motive of action," the Báb creates a symbolic law to convey this principle:

> The substance of this gate is that no behaviour turneth into a real action unless it is performed for the sake of God. It is for this reason that it is enjoined upon all those who perform any act to utter these words at the time of their action: "Verily, I do this for God, the Lord of the heavens and earth, the Lord of all that is seen and unseen, the Lord of creation." Should he recite them in his heart, his action would be rewarded as a result. (Persian Bayán 7:2)

Love, devotion and resilience on the path of service

In the Riḍván 2015 message, the Universal House of Justice writes: "Take heart, too, from the example of your spiritual kin in the Cradle of the Faith, how their constructive outlook, their resilience as a community, and their steadfastness in promoting the Divine Word are bringing about change in their society at the level of thought and deed." The following example of a young man in Iran, who is beginning an unjust two-year prison sentence, reflects a staunchness and resilience characteristic of the Bahá'ís of Iran who face unrelenting and systematic persecution solely for their beliefs. This account captures the way in which this young man's words and actions stir the hearts of all those he comes into contact with as he begins his prison sentence.

A Bahá'í in Yazd, who was arrested in September 2012 with 20 other Bahá'ís begins a two-year prison sentence for his service to the Bahá'í community, service that was labelled by the Court as being "against national security."

Before reporting to prison, this father of two young boys took time to say goodbye to his friends, including the gentleman who had been his children's class teacher and his teacher's wife. As the gentleman searched his thoughts to offer him a comforting quotation, the young man said:

> I have come to show my gratitude to you and all those who contributed to my spiritual growth. The Bahá'í community taught me how to express love and servitude; acquainted me with the truths of the Faith; and showed me the reality of what it means to be steadfast, so that today, I have been endowed with such grace and blessing. The community empowered me to realize, with confidence and heartfelt belief, the validity of the path I have chosen, and with utter awareness, leave my wife, children and home behind, and with honour and dignity walk on the path of service, work for the exaltation of the Faith, and contribute to the enlightenment of my fellow citizens. Pray for me so that I may, like my other friends, rise above every test and trial.

His children's class teacher interrupted him, assuring him that he should not worry about his wife and children, and shared some reminiscences from his own time in prison. The young man, needing no such encouragement, said:

> The day we decided to remain in Iran; the day we blissfully accepted the responsibility of entering the arena of service; the day we reached the conviction that the believers in Iran had been placed in the course of the Divine Plan, the goal of which is the salvation of the peoples of the world, we felt heavily indebted to our ancestors, and committed to continuing the mission for which our loved ones in the sacred land of Iran sacrificed all their possessions, even their pure blood, for the realization of God's purpose. My wife and children have also accepted this reality and proudly welcome it.

The love, devotion and resilience manifest in this reply strongly moved his teacher and his teacher's wife. They expressed their hope that he would be in a comfortable cell and that he might share it with friends and perhaps even another believer.

With a smile, he replied: "Pray that I will be in the worst cell with the most notorious individuals, so that during this time, my character may be further refined and I may influence others."

Later, accompanied by his father, he presented himself at the Revolutionary Court, as requested. The official there, who could not find his file, suggested he go home and return the next day.

"I have said goodbye, and will not go back," he replied. "Please locate the file so that I can go to prison today."

While sitting in the waiting area, a woman asked about the crime of this young man. Upon hearing of the crime for which he was convicted, she begged his father to do something so that he would not go to prison. "I feel pity for this young man," she said. "What business of other people are his beliefs, and why should beliefs lead to a conviction?"

The officer who was preparing to send him to prison repeatedly expressed his regret that his duties required him to do such a thing, saying that he considered the conviction of such cultured and outstanding people as the utmost injustice.

After the preliminary procedures were carried out, the judge on duty met with him. When he became aware of the charge, having become more acquainted with the young man and having noticed his manners and level of education, he expressed his concern with utter astonishment and sympathy. "I do not agree with this kind of treatment," he said. "I am puzzled – why should such individuals be in captivity because of their beliefs?" The judge then respectfully bade him farewell, and the officer in charge sent him to prison after shaking his hand, kissing him and wishing him success.

Recitation of the Prayer for the Dead

The National Spiritual Assembly feels that it is useful to remind the friends from time to time of the correct way to recite the Prayer for the Dead, as the instructions for reciting this prayer are unclear in certain prayer books. The following passages clarify the proper way to recite the repetitions of the greeting "Allah'u'Abha" and the subsequent six verses of the prayer, and include additional guidance.

The Universal House of Justice has received your email of … seeking clarification on the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead, and we have been asked to provide you with the following guidance.

The correct way of reciting the Prayer for the Dead is as follows:

Alláh-u-Abhá (once)
We all, verily, worship God (19 times)
Alláh-u-Abhá (once)
We all, verily, bow down before God (19 times)
Alláh-u-Abhá (once)
We all, verily, are devoted unto God (19 times)
Alláh-u-Abhá (once)
We all, verily, give praise unto God (19 times)
Alláh-u-Abhá (once)
We all, verily yield thanks unto God (19 times)
Alláh-u-Abhá (once)
We all, verily, are patient in God (19 times)

The passages should be repeated by one person. In carrying out the requirements for the prayer, one person reads or recites the passages from memory while the congregation stands.

It is not the practice for those present to repeat any part of the prayer in unison.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 9 February 1999.

The Prayer for the Dead ... is the only Bahá'í obligatory prayer which is to be recited in congregation; it is to be recited by one believer while all present stand in silence (see note 19). Bahá'u'lláh has clarified that the Prayer for the Dead is required only when the deceased is an adult (Q&A 70), that the recital should precede the interment of the deceased, and that there is no requirement to face the Qiblih when saying this prayer (Q&A 85).

Further details concerning the Prayer for the Dead are summarized in the Synopsis and Codification, section IV.A. 13.–14.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, 1992 ed., Notes, pp. 169–170, no. 10.

We have your letter of 23 December 1966 asking whether it is permissible to change the gender of the pronoun in Bahá'í prayers for the dead when the deceased person is a woman.

The prayer for the dead which is obligatory appears on page 260 of "Prayers and Meditations." This prayer allows for a change in gender. Other prayers for the dead are optional, but if used they are to be used as revealed.

The Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 17 January 1967, cited in *Lights of Guidance*, 4th ed., pp. 199–200, no. 600.

The National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, in an electronic mail message dated 11 June 1993, has asked a question about the timing, within the context of the funeral service, for saying the prayer for the dead. They ask if it should be recited at graveside, during the funeral service, or if the bereaved family could say it in private shortly after the death of their loved one.

The Universal House of Justice, in letters written on its behalf, has clarified that:

> "...the Bahá'í congregational prayer for the dead must be recited at some time during the service before the burial takes place."
>
> (21 November 1983 to a National Spiritual Assembly.)

and,

> "The saying of this prayer is, indeed, the only essential element of a Bahá'í funeral service..."
>
> (8 January 1984 to an individual.)

Thus, the prayer must be recited:

- at the funeral service, whether the service precedes going to the graveside or is held at the graveside; and
- before the burial takes place.

Regarding whether the bereaved family could say the prayer privately shortly after the death of their loved one, the Research Department has not located any text prohibiting this. This recitation would not, obviously, void the requirement of saying the prayer at the funeral service.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 19 July 1993.

Correction to the Spring 2015 issue

The Spring 2015 issue of *Bahá'í Canada* features an insert which includes significant Bahá'í dates for the next two years according to the Badí' Calendar. There was an error in the insert for which we apologize. The first day of the month of Bahá in 173 B.E. (2016 - 2017) is listed as 21 March 2016. The date should be 20 March 2016. Please correct your calendar accordingly.

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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

Payments should not be made through a Local Spiritual Assembly.

Inquiries regarding the law of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh), including information about its spiritual significance as well as assistance with calculation, may be referred to your nearest Representative or Deputy Trustee.

Members of the Board of Trustees:	☎	✉	**اعضای هیات امنای حقوق الله در کانادا**
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اطلاعیهء مهم در خصوص نحوهء پرداخت "حقوق الله"

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

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

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

سؤالات مربوط به حقوق الله، همچنین مطالب راجع به جنبهء روحانی این فریضه و راهنمائی دربارهء نحوهء محاسبهء مبالغ حقوق الله را میتوان از معاونین و یا نمایندگان امین حقوق الله درخواست کرد.

How to contribute to the Funds of the Faith:

Through a Local Spiritual Assembly: For further information, please contact the Treasurer of your Local Assembly.

Through the Regional Bahá'í Council in your area, which operates the Regional Branch of the National Fund.

Online at <www.bahaifunds.ca>, directly from your bank chequing account or through your credit card. Contributions may be made on a one-time basis, or set up in an ongoing manner, such as every Bahá'í month, on a specific day of the Gregorian month, twice each month, or bi-weekly.

Through the National Spiritual Assembly: Kindly make your cheque payable to "Canadian Bahá'í Fund" and mail to:

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

You can reach the Treasury Department by:

- Mail: at the aforementioned address
- Fax: (905) 889-8184
- E-mail: <treasury@cdnbnc.org>

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

Local Fund (only through a Local Spiritual Assembly or Online method – see above)
National Fund
Deputization Fund
Continental Fund
Wilmette House of Worship Fund
Santiago House of Worship Fund
International Fund
World Centre Endowment Fund

Institute Boards

British Columbia and the Yukon
303-2150 Brunswick St.
Vancouver, BC, V5T 3L5
iboardbcy@gmail.com
778-829-1817

Alberta
59 Royal Ridge Manor NW
Calgary, AB, T3G 5Z1
ibalberta@gmail.com

Saskatchewan & Manitoba
sk.mb.ib@gmail.com

Ontario
instituteboard@ontariobahai.org
647-818-8576

Quebec
secretariat@institutbahaiqc.org
418-928-5955

Atlantic Provinces
135 Bunker St.
Fredericton, NB, E3A 0T1
atlanticbahaiib@gmail.com

Bahá'í Councils

British Columbia
PO Box 2871 Vancouver Main
Vancouver, BC, V6B 3X4
250-507-2765
council.secretariat@gmail.com

Alberta
64 Everhollow Rise SW
Calgary, AB, T2Y 5H2
ab_council@shaw.ca
403-455-1230

Saskatchewan & Manitoba
PO Box 1642
Saskatoon, SK, S7K 3R8
sk.mb.rbc@gmail.com

Ontario
288 Bloor Street W.
Toronto, ON, M5S 1V8
council@ontariobahai.org
289-356-4005

Quebec
310C-7300, avenue Tisserand
Brossard, QC, J4W 2Z3
secretariat@conseil.bahaiqc.org
514-237-0973

Atlantic Provinces
PO Box 7073
Riverview, NB, E1B 4T8
bahai.council@gmail.com
902-894-5503

How to:

Purchase Bahá'í books

For Bahá'í books in English, Persian, Chinese and Spanish, visit <bookstore.bahai.ca>

Or contact:

University of Toronto Press Distribution
1-800-565-9523
416-667-7791

In the event that the title you are looking for is not available, contact the Bahá'í Distribution Service:
<bds-admin@cdnbnc.org>
1-800-465-3287
905-889-8168

For Bahá'í books in French, contact the

Service de distribution bahá'í - Québec (SDB-Q)
75 d'auteuil Street
Québec QC G1R 4C3
418-692-2402
<sdbq@videotron.ca>
<http://bookstore.bahai.ca/sdb-catalogue.pdf>

Travel-teach and pioneer within Canada

"The institutions, in turn, will have to exercise sound judgement to ensure that such friends are strategically placed. Priority should be given to settling short-term and long-term pioneers in those clusters that are the focus of systematic attention . . ."

Contact the National Spiritual Assembly <secretariat@cdnbnc.org> or 905-889-8168 for where to direct your offer of service within Canada.

Pioneer internationally

Contact the International Pioneer Department at 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8, phone 905-889-8168,
fax 905-889-8184,
email: <pioneer@cdnbnc.org>.

Contact by email

Email addresses for various departments at the Bahá'í National Centre in Thornhill, Ontario:

National Spiritual Assembly: secretariat@cdnbnc.org

Treasury: treasury@cdnbnc.org

Bahá'í Canada Committee: bcanada@cdnbnc.org

National and Unit Conventions: conventions@cdnbnc.org

Office of External Affairs: externalaffairs@cdnbnc.org

Records Department: records@cdnbnc.org

If you are not sure to which department you should be directing your email, please use <secretariat@cdnbnc.org> and your email will be forwarded to the correct department.

Get international travel credentials

Request international credentials from the Bahá'í National Centre when planning to visit countries other than the United States. Contact the Records Department at <records@cdnbnc.org>. International travelling teachers are asked to contact the International Pioneer Department at <pioneer@cdnbnc.org>, or at 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8.

Change your address

Moving? Please notify your Spiritual Assembly or Group so it can notify the Records Department of the National Spiritual Assembly, or notify the Records Department directly, by sending a note containing your name, old address, new address and your Bahá'í ID number to: Records Department, Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8; fax: 905-889-8184; email: <records@cdnbnc.org>.

Apply for pilgrimage

All pilgrimage requests (nine-day pilgrimage or three-day visit) are to be made directly to the Bahá'í World Centre. Applications are in writing only; telephoned requests cannot be accepted. The Bahá'í Pilgrimage Website <http://pilgrimage.bahai.org> offers information and an online pilgrimage application form. Those without access to the Internet may send their applications for pilgrimage by post or fax: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel; fax: 011-972-4-835-8507.

Plan a Bahá'í wedding

When you are planning to get married please contact, without delay, the Local Spiritual Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will be held. A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place without the authorization of the Local Assembly.

Submit items to *Bahá'í Canada*

Send news, photos, etc. to: <bcanada@cdnbnc.org>; 7200 Leslie St., Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8.

Items submitted to *Bahá'í Canada* are considered for publication online and in the magazine. The website is updated regularly and the magazine is published three times per year.

Register for the *Bahá'í Canada* website:

First time visitors to the *Bahá'í Canada* website will need to register by clicking "register" on the home page of the website:<https://bahaicanada.bahai.ca>. Enter your details as prompted. Please note, you must enter your Bahá'í ID number and your first and last name as they appear on your Bahá'í ID card. If you have a middle initial, this should be entered in the "First Name" field alongside your first name. Should you experience any difficulty registering, please do not hesitate to email <bcanada@cdnbnc.org> or call 905-889-8168.

Find "Bahá'í" on the Internet

The Universal house of Justice: <www.universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org>

The Bahá'í World: <www.bahai.org>

Bahá'í Reference Library: <www.reference.bahai.org>

Website of the worldwide Bahá'í community: <www.bahai.org>

Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Statement Library: <www.bic-un.bahai.org>

Bahá'í World News Service: <www.news.bahai.org>

Bahá'í Community of Canada: <www.ca.bahai.org>

Canadian Bahá'í News: <bahainews.ca>

Transforming Neighbourhoods: <www.transformingneighbourhoods.org>

Bahá'í Distribution Service: <www.bookstore.bahai.ca>

One Country: <http://onecountry.org>

Life of Bahá'u'lláh: <www.bahaullah.org>