# BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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## A sense of common endeavour

# From the Writings

Every receptive soul who hath in this Day inhaled the fragrance of His garment and hath, with a pure heart, set his face towards the all-glorious Horizon is reckoned among the people of Bahá in the Crimson Book. Grasp ye, in My Name, the chalice of My loving-kindness; drink then your fill in My glorious and wondrous remembrance.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance*, no. 32, p. 159.

He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. Haste ye to win your share of God's good grace and mercy in this Day that eclipseth all other created Days. How great the felicity that awaiteth the man that forsaketh all he hath in a desire to obtain the things of God! Such a man, We testify, is among God's blessed ones.

- Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* CVII, p. 214.

O SON OF SPIRIT! The spirit of holiness beareth unto thee the joyful tidings of reunion; wherefore dost thou grieve? The spirit of power confirmeth thee in His cause; why dost thou veil thyself? The light of His countenance doth lead thee; how canst thou go astray?

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, From the Arabic, no. 34.

Thus will these young plants in the garden of God's love grow and flourish under the warmth of the Sun of Truth, the gentle spring winds of Heaven, and their mother's guiding hand. Thus, in the Abha Paradise, will each become a tree, bearing his clustered fruit, and each one, in this new and wondrous season, out of the bounties of the spring, will become possessed of all beauty and grace.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 113, p. 146.

In short, O ye believers of God! Exalt your effort and magnify your aims. His Holiness Christ says: Blessed are the poor, for theirs shall be the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words: Blessed are the nameless and traceless poor, for they are the leaders of mankind. Likewise it is said in the Qur'án: "And We desire to show favor to those who were brought low in the land, and to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make of them Our heirs." Or, we wish to grant a favor to the impotent souls and suffer them to become the inheritors of the Messengers and Prophets.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, no. 6, p. 34.

He is God. O God, my God! I have set my face towards Thee, and supplicate the outpourings of the ocean of Thy healing. Graciously assist me, O Lord, to serve Thy people and to heal Thy servants. If Thou dost aid me, the remedy I offer will become a healing medicine for every ailment, a draught of life-giving waters for every burning thirst, and a soothing balm for every yearning heart. If Thou dost not aid me, it will be naught but affliction itself, and I will scarcely bring healing to any soul.

O God, my God! Aid and assist me through Thy power to heal the sick. Thou art, verily, the Healer, the Sufficer, He Who is the remover of every pain and sickness, He Who hath dominion over all things.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Additional Prayers Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

O ye kind friends! Uplift your magnanimity and soar high toward the apex of heaven so that your blessed hearts may become illumined more and more, day by day, through the rays of the Sun of Reality, that is, His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh; at every moment the spirits may obtain a new life, and the darkness of the world of nature may be entirely dispelled; thus you may become incarnate light and personified spirit, become entirely unaware of the sordid matters of this world and in touch with the affairs of the divine world.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, no. 8, p. 50.

It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty—may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city...These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 55, p. 100.

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7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill ON L3T 6L8
phone: (905) 889-8168 fax: (905) 889-8184
email: secretariat@bahai.ca

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email: records@bahai.ca

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# Riḍván 2026 message

To the Bahá'ís of the World, Riḍván 2026.

Dearly loved Friends,

Now begins the second, greater phase of the Nine Year Plan. We see the global Bahá'í community advancing in unison, justly confident in the course it has set. Its clarity and conviction are unmistakable. Undaunted by the world's swelling turmoil, it is focused on its sacred mission. We rejoice in particular to see newly confirmed believers eagerly taking their place in the field of service and action alongside those long confirmed in the Faith. Third milestone clusters are proving to be fertile ground for rich experience to be harvested and propagated. And we have been pleased to see the friends everywhere reflecting on the message we addressed to the Counsellors who assembled here in December and drawing on its contents as they plan and act.

This purposeful spirit has been especially evident in the institutional meetings that have been convened around the world. Again and again, the accounts of these gatherings have reported the same phenomenon: a profound, insightful conversation based on direct experience of building vibrant communities rather than on assumptions or theory. This conversation is animated by the ongoing process of learning in each place. It is imbued with a deeper recognition of the significance of the Bahá'í community's endeavours and the implications they hold for a troubled world in desperate need of direction. A sense of responsibility and resolve is widely felt, and there is an acute awareness of the scale of the task at hand. Often, this conversation opens up an additional, complementary perspective which recognizes the efforts of communities and individuals not simply as the pursuit of programmes and projects, but as the cultivation of a way of life patterned on the divine teachings—a shaping of actions, interactions, and aspirations.

This same earnest conversation, reflecting a commitment to learning, is being advanced across the community from the national and regional levels all the way to the village and neighbourhood, and in a variety of settings, including meetings arranged by the institutions as well as other spaces that are emerging. It will surely be a feature of National Conventions too. We look forward to seeing patterns of individual and collective action being strengthened and expanded as this conversation unfolds. As always, it is a conversation which should be extended to ever-widening circles of friends, neighbours, and other like-minded souls who identify with efforts to bring about spiritual and material progress founded on the oneness of humankind. The spaces being created for broadening this conversation—whether they are spontaneous or planned long in advance—are an indication of a deepening involvement with society, and we hope they will become more and more common.

Many in the wider society who encounter the grassroots activity of Bahá'ís are struck by its distinctive characteristics: it springs from a sincere concern for the well-being of all, it is oriented towards unity and service, and it follows clear principles yet does not presume to have an immediate answer to every problem. In a spirit of common endeavour, Bahá'ís seek to collaborate with others and to learn together; and in the relationships they form with those who occupy positions of authority and responsibility in society, they are earnest and clear-sighted. They pursue social change without political ambition or self-interest, and they recognize that, as the prominence of the Faith rises, it becomes important to ensure that its true character and aims are well understood. In many places, the growing depth of the community's interactions with society means, inevitably, that there are new situations to navigate and new questions to answer, and this is compelling the community to further develop its own capabilities.

As we explained in our message to the recent Counsellors' Conference, a significant development over the last four years has been the emergence of the community as a more conspicuous protagonist of the Plan, organizing itself in order to meet particular needs and advance particular fields of endeavour, to provide mutual support through collaborative arrangements, and to learn to be increasingly effective within an evolving framework for action. A striking example of this is groups of youth, working together in a locality and encouraging the participation of their peers. Naturally, their efforts benefit tremendously from the loving encouragement and guidance of the institutions, but the youth have also shown their ability to take initiative and identify fruitful avenues of service. All too often, their endeavours are occurring against a backdrop of conflict and disorder, economic inequity, and deep social divisions. We recognize the challenges the youth face in such conditions, and we commend them for resisting the impulse to criticize and condemn, finding instead constructive ways to steer around these imposing obstacles and work towards ultimately overcoming them.

Beloved friends, however turbulent the times, we urge you not to be apprehensive or disheartened. 'Abdu'l-Bahá counsels us all to rely on the bounties of God, and so to be "ever hopeful", to be "firm" in our hope, and

to be "the cause of hope to the despairing soul". When the world's horizons darken, hope becomes a scarce and precious resource—but one with which the community of the Greatest Name has been richly blessed because of its conviction about the future of humanity and because of what it has learned from its own experience. Multitudes yearn for the hope you can bring to their hearts.

For a golden example of a community that has long sheltered the flame of hope, we look to the wronged yet ever-patient, ever-steadfast, ever-resilient followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the Cradle of His Faith. See how disciplined they have remained, how committed to principle over decades of unrelenting oppression—and how resolved they have been to learn from the advances made by their fellow believers in other lands, how determined to serve and console their fellow citizens in their own land. To so many of their compatriots they have been, and continue to be, a beacon of hope, a fount of compassion and insight, and trusted companions on the path of service. In recent weeks and months, these friends whom we cherish so dearly have been a constant presence in our thoughts and the repeated subject of our prayers, as we are sure they have been of yours, asking the Ever-Loving Lord to hold them in the embrace of His tender care.

Your own endeavours to advance the Cause of God are no less the focus of the supplications we offer at the Sacred Threshold—especially now, at the commencement of the new phase in the Nine Year Plan. As often as we repair to the Holy Shrines, we implore divine aid and assistance for your efforts, and beseech fortitude and strength for you in your labours. May you be swift to act and eager to learn, and may all the blessings of the celestial kingdom be yours.

– The Universal House of Justice

# Regarding the Nine Year Plan of the worldwide Bahá'í community

To the conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 31 December 2025.

Dearly loved Friends,

The first phase of the Nine Year Plan has cast a light on the Bahá'í community's considerable strengths. The unprecedented energy and determination with which the Plan was launched, at over 10,000 gatherings of Bahá'ís and interested friends, quickly raised awareness of its objectives and special character. Swift action followed. We anticipate that by Riḍván there will be a cluster where the third milestone has been passed in around half of the 160 countries and regions where, at the start of the Plan, still no such cluster existed—a dramatic accomplishment. Valuable experience has been gained as a result, not least through the dedicated efforts of an impressive number of individuals who arose as part of a coordinated strategy of pioneering. At the same time, particular attention has been directed in all countries towards third milestone clusters, and consequently, the frontiers of learning have advanced considerably and the society-building power of the Faith is becoming more apparent. Many of these clusters are acting as reservoirs of knowledge and resources to the clusters that surround them, and this is proving vital to the process of growth everywhere. Indeed, the rapid movement of clusters past the first, second, and third milestones requires that this pattern be strengthened and widely replicated. For, gratified as we are by the progress made, it is evident that a most formidable task lies ahead if each national Bahá'í community is to fulfil the aspirations for the movement of clusters that it set for itself when the Plan began. There is an urgent need to cultivate more broadly the capacities that are required to intensify a programme of growth. The primary point of reference for this work—and for all the work of the Nine Year Plan—will, of course, continue to be our 30 December 2021 message, but within these few pages, we will seek to present a number of insights that have emerged from the efforts of communities, institutions, and individuals as they have put the Plan into effect.

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In clusters and in neighbourhoods and villages where notable progress has occurred, no matter from what starting point, an essential factor has been the capacity of the friends at the grassroots to learn together, combining insights gained from their own experience with those of advanced communities nearby or further afield, without any sense of applying a fixed formula. Although the fundamental features of a programme of growth—its aim, its guiding principles, and its basic instruments—are the same everywhere, growth is an organic process, not a mechanical one. In such a process, progress depends at each point on maintaining a clear understanding of the priorities that pertain to a place and, as we emphasized in our message to your 2021 conference, reading evolving realities and adopting approaches suited to local conditions.

The third milestone is a measurement of a journey whose beginnings are well understood. Once it is passed, clusters where progress has been consolidated can be seen to share

important features. The institute's programmes are being supported by a relatively substantial and expanding pool of human resources. Effort is being made to enable more neighbourhoods and villages to sustain intense activity. There is a capacity to embrace large numbers and manage increasing complexity through both formal and informal arrangements. Crucially, in these clusters, consistent attention is being given to sustaining effective cycles, so that there is a regular pulse of study, consultation, action, and reflection through which the community enhances its capacity to grow and to contribute to the advancement of the society to which it belongs. These cycles include periods of particular intensity, an injection of energy that is propelling the engagement of the widest possible circle of friends. Community undertakings such as family festivals, junior youth camps, service projects, arts endeavours, and collective teaching initiatives are proceeding according to their own respective rhythms. Reflection spaces bring together many friends, and the use of such spaces is thoughtful and deliberate—there is awareness that the quality and utility of reflection is measured by the purposeful action arising from it. From these clusters, resources flow to surrounding clusters to help the friends there make accelerated progress.

We have observed with particular interest how a pronounced community spirit can increasingly be felt among all those involved in the pattern of activity in third milestone clusters, even when it is not very strong in the wider society. It is often expressed as a feeling of belonging and a sense of common endeavour and mutual support. This and other advances at the level of culture are becoming especially evident in the cluster's centres of intense activity—not only where participation can be measured as a significant proportion of the population, but in any neighbourhood or village where large numbers are attracted to the programmes and activities of the community. There is a rise, too, in various collaborative arrangements, which are doing much to build or reshape a shared social identity and collective purpose. These arrangements include the groups of families and households we mentioned in 2021 and also other natural groupings such as women or youth, farmers or educators, and animators or children's class teachers, often with a supportive network of friends. Groups of this kind set about organizing their own efforts to improve some aspect of the life of the community, and they promote broader participation in those efforts. In other words, they are helping the growth and development of the community to become self-perpetuating, and they are doing so without the need for new layers of administrative structure. This is consequential. It demonstrates the emerging capacity of the community to be a visible protagonist in the Plan. Buttressed by the full confidence and loving guidance of the institutions, the community is steering the trajectory of its own development with creativity and ingenuity, and exploring how the principles contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation can be applied to the issues that confront it within its immediate reality.

It is no surprise that the community-based initiatives we described to you in 2021 often proceed from the collaborative arrangements mentioned above. These modest but sustained initiatives of social action represent an area of endeavour which, of course, has been implicit in a programme of growth from the beginning; even in the earliest institute courses, capacity is built for actions that contribute to the betterment of the world and for meaningful conversations on matters of social significance. In the last four years, the number of community-based initiatives emerging out of the activities of the Plan has increased considerably. Some have also come about as the result of the encouragement, training, and assistance of a Bahá'í-inspired organization. All these initiatives are more likely to arise in places where the community-building process has advanced notably, and we appreciate the support that you and your auxiliaries, as well as Local Spiritual Assemblies, have given to such initiatives. The conditions that enable these to appear and flourish in different settings around the world are being actively explored by the Bahá'í International Development Organization, including how, in time, some of these initiatives develop into community-based organizations.

At the heart of a community's progress, of course, is the institute process. So long as the capacity to work with large numbers in a cluster is still being built, it is natural for the efforts of the institute to be focused almost exclusively on raising up human resources that can carry out specific acts of service. But over time, after the third milestone has been passed and particular centres of intense activity have gained strength, the institute will also devote more serious thought to the systematic and effective delivery of the programmes it offers from childhood to adulthood, and the propagation of these programmes in other parts of the cluster. Classes for children in all the grades begin to be introduced, the number of texts being studied by junior youth groups increases, and participation in both programmes is sustained year-on-year, all of which gives these undertakings a higher degree of formalization. Often, these advances are relying on the service rendered by a growing cohort of youth. The institute's efforts are gradually being complemented by additional educational endeavours for the development of a population, such as programmes utilizing Bahá'í-inspired materials, as well as courses available in the wider society, or even, in some places, a community school. In our 30 December 2021 message, we expressed the hope that attention would be given to helping young people access educational opportunities, and we have been pleased to see this need being met in a variety of ways, including after-school tutoring and assistance for youth wishing to enter higher education. As a broad educational path begins to take shape, a community feels a greater responsibility to stimulate and encourage each of its members, especially the young, to advance along it in pursuit of spiritual and intellectual growth.

We have noted the benefits that come from raising awareness in the wider society of the educational value

of the institute's programmes. This has involved efforts to reach out to the parents and relatives of children and junior youth, and also to officials and senior educators with whom Bahá'ís are interacting. Such efforts are broadening the support given to institute activities by the wider society, including by public institutions and agencies as well as traditional leaders. Indeed, in clusters where the Bahá'í community's endeavours have achieved a significant level of visibility and respect, it is not unusual for figures in authority in local government, public services, and civil society to reach out for insight and collaboration. The believers and the Local Spiritual Assemblies that represent them are open to working alongside the institutions of society and welcome such contact, while remaining vigilant to avoid becoming entangled in politics. At times, we have seen how the friends' relationship with the organs of local government expands beyond collaboration to embrace a sense of shared mission, focused on the advancement of society—a people moving as one. In more and more places, the generality of the inhabitants are coming to regard the Local Assembly as being theirs as well, and they see the light that shines from it.

In 2021 we highlighted the possibilities that can be realized when Bahá'í activity becomes prevalent in a place, and although the settings where this has occurred remain relatively modest in number, they are a steadily growing phenomenon. These are specific places within a cluster where the society-building power of the Faith is at its most visible. Here, the workings of the Plan are becoming embedded in the everyday life of a people in ways that cannot be easily measured or described in their totality. In their collective efforts and deliberations, the friends in such locations are increasingly occupied with cultivating spaces in which people consult and share knowledge, derived from both science and religion, and find ways to apply that knowledge to family development, education, economic activity, public health, and other fundamental processes of community life, infusing them with a fresh spirit. Given the far-reaching implications of what is occurring, the term "programme of growth" no longer does full justice to such developments. Although in other parts of the cluster growth might still be at an early stage, here, where the level of participation in Bahá'í activities is so high, a new reality is coming into view as the Bahá'í community's relationship with society evolves. Bright horizons beckon.

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In the natural environment, combinations and connections create vibrancy and new life; likewise, a flourishing process of learning arises from countless formal and informal interactions and their emergent properties. This process is characterized by a free-flowing, uninterrupted exchange of insights, experience, and ideas among the friends at the grassroots. But it does not end there—it continues to unfold at the regional and national levels and beyond, and learning at each level is fostered by the dynamic discussions that take place in spaces created for reflection on action. These discussions draw on lessons arising from the efforts of the global Bahá'í community within the Plan's framework as well as conclusions derived from the analysis of patterns emerging locally. Of course, these discussions are also shaped by the institutions and agencies serving at each level. For while individuals, communities, and institutions all have a contribution to make, it is the institutions of the Faith that are ultimately charged with tending to this entire ecosystem of learning. An essential requirement is to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place, both institutional and less formal, to enable it to thrive, and that all those involved in the learning process are connected by loving relationships imbued with a spirit of humility and magnanimity.

The capacity of institutions and agencies to foster a process of learning is closely connected with their capacity to administer the work effectively and efficiently. As the various lines of action in a locality multiply and interact, Local Assemblies have increasingly been able to meet the need for coordination and planning. The Assemblies often share this responsibility with cluster agencies, and together they ensure that advice, resources, and encouragement are being directed to where they are most needed and that the process of learning continues to advance. The cluster agencies in particular see to it that lessons learned in one locality, or even in a small portion of it, benefit the rest of the cluster. Meanwhile, the approach to sharing knowledge and insights within a cluster is being mirrored by the approach to sharing knowledge and insights among clusters. The swift provision of support and exchange of experience has become possible through the development of arrangements within groups of adjoining clusters. With Regional Bahá'í Councils or a National Growth Committee now established in every country, the institutional means are in place everywhere for the process of growth to be systematically advanced. And at the national level, when the richness of what is occurring demands it, National Assemblies have developed certain structures and spaces to help them keep abreast of what is being learned. Naturally, a new feature would not be introduced unless the needs of growth demand it; nevertheless, we look to you and your auxiliaries to be alert to when existing arrangements at any level of the community need to evolve to meet the requirements of growth, and then, in your interactions with relevant institutions, to encourage the emergence of new arrangements in a suitable form.

We have also noted how the administrative arrangements that support the work of the training institute are evolving in a way that nurtures a process of learning about the accelerated spread of the institute's programmes, delivered with the requisite quality. In the early stages, these arrangements are quite simple, but as the number of those in a cluster serving as tutors, animators, and children's class teachers grows, the need for them to engage meaningfully in a collective learning process

becomes more pressing. It is vital that they be able to maintain an ongoing conversation with one another, to reflect together in groups, and to support each other in action. These patterns of interaction develop more easily when the friends involved are accompanied effectively by coordinators and the collaborators who assist them. Of course, coordinators themselves also need to be raised up in each cluster and helped to develop their capacity over time, and this is generally the responsibility of regional or national institute coordinators, whose own endeavours, in turn, are increasingly being reinforced by teams of friends for each educational programme. In the last four years, these teams have done much to assist the regional and national coordinators to organize seminars that explore the content of a programme in depth, enabling the institute's materials to be delivered to larger numbers with ever-greater creativity, flexibility, and agility—but without compromising a programme's essential components.

All the while, the experience and insights emerging from what an institute is learning are being collected, analysed, and shared. This work is benefiting greatly from gatherings for consultation, periodically convened by the institute, that bring together Auxiliary Board members, representatives of the Regional Bahá'í Council or National Growth Committee, resource persons from the learning site, and other individuals whose experience has become a valued asset. The meetings of this collaborative group help to strengthen the institute's connections with other institutions and agencies, ensuring that its learning process unfolds within the broader context of learning about the overall process of growth. The institute board is also fostering the strength of all other aspects of the institute, including its administrative capacity, so that it can sustain a progressively more complex system of spiritual education. And almost all institutes have now been organized into groupings to facilitate the flow of both practical support and valuable insights; the development of these networks has proven to be an important strategy for institutes to advance rapidly.

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It has consistently brought us joy to see the enkindled souls described in our message to your 2021 conference, in cluster after cluster and in greater and greater numbers, pursuing the Plan with whole-hearted devotion and, critically, a dedication to the process of learning. This is the surest foundation for the progress that needs to be made in the Plan's second phase.

The processes unfolding in the Plan are of course exerting a profound, transformative impact on the individual. What we observe is eager friends learning how to more closely align their pursuits with the Will of God. Through engagement with the Plan's framework for action, individuals are discovering ways to improve life—in all its aspects—for themselves, for their children, for their wider family, and for their community. Theirs is a heightened spiritual consciousness that leads to a life of purpose and meaning, a life dedicated to developing their God-given potentialities and labouring for the transformation of society. They recognize the value of knowledge in propelling progress, are committed to its generation, and share it freely and humbly. Learning is a habit of mind for them, an orientation in all they do. In every face they see a fellow seeker after truth. They wholly devote themselves to the spiritual, intellectual, and material advancement of a population. They are not swept off course by the world's unabating distractions. Steady do they go, patient and perseverant, pledged to long-term endeavour. And in the company of many others, they are building havens of peace.

It has been seen again and again that as individuals become more conscious of the significance of an expansive pattern of activity in their surroundings, they readily volunteer time and creative energy to develop it further. More generally, believers also help their community by contributing to the Fund and offering other types of material resources. While all believers make contributions of this kind, for some believers of means, this is a way of advancing the Plan that they are especially well positioned to utilize. Whatever form a person's service takes, it emerges from the unique interaction between, on the one hand, the needs of the Faith and, on the other, the possibilities afforded by the circumstances of each individual and the sacrifices that he or she chooses to make.

And the believers increasingly appreciate the privilege of being able to acquaint a soul with the mission of Bahá'u'lláh—and, beyond this, to lovingly help a soul who stands at the doors of the Faith to step within. In 2021 we drew attention to this infinitely precious moment in a spiritual journey. We have noted with interest that, since then, the friends in many places have focused attention on how to recognize when the city of the heart is open, and on the conversations that lead to this moment and that follow it. Much remains to be learned in this regard, both about how to discern receptivity in different settings and how to acknowledge when it has already matured into faith.

Looking back over one's life, there can be no greater joy and comfort than to know that it was spent in acute awareness of the divine remedy, that no effort was spared to proffer that remedy to receptive souls, and that during those fleeting years when opportunity was at hand, even in the midst of difficulties, every chance was seized to respond to humanity's intense need. With ardour and longing we beseech Bahá'u'lláh, every time we present ourselves at His Threshold, for the success of all the friends.

– The Universal House of Justice

# Regarding the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

To the Bahá'ís of the World, 4 January 2026.

Dearly loved Friends,

Five days of earnest consultation among the Continental Counsellors, who are assembled here in the Holy Land for their conference on the next phase of the Nine Year Plan, have reached their conclusion today, and we send you this message at the close of that auspicious gathering. We have heard accounts from the Counsellors of your many endeavours, the advances being made in settings of all kinds, and how these have contributed to a flourishing process of learning at every level of the community. We have been delighted by descriptions of how, through various collaborative arrangements, the community itself is emerging as a more visible protagonist in the work of the Plan. And we have marvelled at what is occurring within populations that have a very high level of participation in Bahá'í activities, in places where the community's relationship with society is deepening and rapidly evolving.

The significant contribution made to this progress by the Counsellors themselves, ably guided in all their efforts by the International Teaching Centre, is unmistakable. We have been struck by the keenness of their observations and the clarity of their reflections, both infused with their evident love for the communities they serve. The basis for their consultations has been the message we addressed to their conference on its opening day and which was immediately sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies so that it could be shared with you without delay. No time had passed before a veritable torrent of reports arrived of the message being studied by groups of eager friends, even those who had gathered for other purposes. We were deeply touched by these widespread evidences of a desire to quickly comprehend what the Bahá'í world has learned over the last four years and to ascertain what must be done to advance the Plan further over the next five. This will also be the focus of a series of institutional gatherings to be held in the coming months, during which, no doubt, the Counsellors will share insights that have arisen from their deliberations here.

At Riḍván, the first phase of the Nine Year Plan will conclude and the second phase will commence. This moment of progression is an ideal time to engage with the numerous souls in whose company the Plan was launched four years ago, and whose number has since expanded to include countless new friends who have been attracted to devotional meetings, educational activities, and other Bahá'í initiatives. We invite all to reflect together, whether in dedicated spaces, at regular community gatherings, or within one another's homes, on what has been learned and what has been accomplished. And in contemplating the significance of this global enterprise, we feel sure you will also be moved to consider how your actions, and those of your household and your community, could help the aim of the Plan to be realized.

"It is the concern of the True One to reveal," Bahá'u'lláh has stated, "and the concern of the people to spread what hath been revealed." The devoted, spirited, diverse efforts being made to carry to every receptive heart what the True One has revealed—to offer hope to a trouble-gripped humanity, to offer the means of being a conscious agent in the work of worldwide spiritual renewal—are an abiding cause for admiration and wonder, for rejoicing and gratitude. Such are the emotions that crowd our breasts at this time, and with which we will entreat Bahá'u'lláh at His Sacred Shrine later today to send you blessings from out His measureless grace.

– The Universal House of Justice

# The passing of Glenford E. Mitchell

To all National Spiritual Assemblies,
8 February 2026.

Dearly loved Friends,

The passing of Glenford E. Mitchell from this earthly plane robs the Bahá'í world of an illustrious, accomplished, deeply spiritual servant of Bahá'u'lláh. We mourn the loss of our dearly loved former colleague with sorrowful hearts, calling to mind his penetrating powers of insight and uncommon good sense, to which he harnessed his compelling command of language—a combination of rare qualities that answered to so many demands during his membership of the Universal House of Justice. This period, stretching for more than a quarter century, crowned a lifetime of service and followed fourteen years in which he held the office of Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. During his life, his gifts of character, skill, and understanding served him well as a journalist, an author, and an inspirational educator of youth. From an early age, his heart and mind were galvanized by the writings of the beloved Guardian and the vision they encapsulated of a new World Order, founded on justice and operating according to the cardinal principle of the oneness of humanity. To this bright vision enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh he dedicated his entire life.

We offer our condolences to his dear wife, Bahia, and his daughter, Tarissa, for their loss, and we assure them of our supplications that his noble soul may receive a joyous welcome in the eternal realm. The friends throughout the world are called upon to hold befitting memorial gatherings in his honour, including in every House of Worship.

– The Universal House of Justice

# A further call for pioneers

To the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 7 May 2026.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On 19 June 2022, the Universal House of Justice, in a letter written on its behalf, called upon your community to assist countries at an earlier stage of development both by raising pioneers who can settle in goal clusters and by offering support to those clusters. The House of Justice has been following closely the progress of international pioneering during the Nine Year Plan, and we have been asked to convey the following to you with regard to the assistance you can lend in this arena during the second phase of the Plan.

The House of Justice has been delighted to learn, from reports received at the Bahá'í World Centre, of the flow of pioneers from your shores to lands abroad over the past few years. Looking ahead, it feels that your ongoing consideration will be required to ensure the continued presence of pioneers in the existing goal areas. This can be achieved by taking steps to quickly replace any pioneers leaving their posts, until at least one third milestone cluster has been raised in each receiving country. Further, it is with joy that the House of Justice now calls upon your community, with the capacity it has demonstrated, to raise additional pioneers––a possibility envisaged in June 2022. It is hoped that four pioneers can be dispatched to Martinique and St. Lucia as soon as possible in the second phase of the Nine Year Plan. Further, you are being called upon to dispatch two pioneers to Ukraine. Owing to the current conditions in that country, these individuals should be first dispatched to nearby countries where communities are already engaging with Ukrainian populations until such time as they can settle in Ukraine. The relevant Counsellors will be in contact with you about the countries where these pioneers can initially be directed towards.

The spirit of self-sacrifice and dedication shown by those who have arisen to pioneer is no doubt a source of inspiration to the friends in Canada, and it is hoped that this same spirit will continue to animate the efforts of your community. Rest assured of the prayers of the House of Justice that blessings and confirmations may surround all those who have dedicated their energies to this vital arena.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

# Increased visiting hours at the Montreal Shrine

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 5 March 2026.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly is delighted to share that the Bahá'í Shrine in Montréal will soon be open to visitors four days a week, plus on Bahá'í Holy Days. The Shrine is now open on Sunday afternoons and as of Friday, 27 March, it will also be open on Friday evenings. Therefore, by the end of March, the regular visiting hours will be:

Wednesdays and Fridays: 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Saturdays and Bahá'í Holy Days: 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sundays: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Additional information about the Shrine and how to book a visit can be found on the Canadian Bahá'í website at https://www.bahai.ca/en/bahai-shrine-in-montreal/visiting/.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Nabet Fani, Assistant Secretary




The door of the Bahá'í Shrine in Montreal.

Photo: Bahá'í Community of Canada

# Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 28 April 2026.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are happy to share with you the results of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly on Saturday, 25 April 2026. The following individuals were elected by the delegates at the National Convention to serve for the coming year: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Nabet Fani, Hoda Farahmandpour, Ciprian Jauca, Karen McKye, and Veronica Robinson.

In addition, the National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to convey the results of the election of its officers on 9 May 2026:

Chairman – Hoda Farahmandpour; Vice-chairman – Veronica Robinson; Treasurer – Mehran Anvari; Secretary – Karen McKye; Assistant Secretary – Nabet Fani.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Karen McKye, Secretary



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

# Letter from the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada

To the delegates of the National Convention,
24 April 2026.

Dear Friends,

In the sacred atmosphere of this gathering, marked by a spirit of devotion and shared purpose, the Board of Trustees wishes to convey its whole-hearted love to each one of you. We are deeply grateful to the National Spiritual Assembly for this opportunity to share a few thoughts on the Right of God and its vital place within the tapestry of laws and principles that guide our collective efforts and are destined to give rise to a new World Order.

Amidst worldwide uncertainty, scarcity and social fragmentation, when systems upheld by self-interest and greed cause ever greater harm to the majority of the members of our human family, the urgency for the Divine Remedy of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings, enshrined in His laws and precepts becomes all the more apparent. Indeed, we are assured that by observing this particular law, we are contributing to "*a process which will, in the centuries ahead, give rise to a transformation of society far beyond our present capacity to comprehend.*"[1]

With our gaze directed steadfastly on the aims of the Nine Year Plan, which we are all endeavouring to fulfill, it is fitting to pause and reflect on the various instruments that will provide the means for their realization. One such instrument is observance of the mighty Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, an ordinance which not only provides the materials means for the progress and promotion of the Cause of God, but "*creates a direct and vital link between the individual believer and the Head of the Faith, enables the friends to become firm and steadfast, and, as the beloved Master affirms, exerts 'a great influence on their hearts and souls'.*"[2]

In adhering to this law, an individual believer is given the opportunity to "*express his or her personal sense of devotion to God in a profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good.*"[3] Purifying our worldly possessions and offering our share towards the greater good in a spirit of joy and fellowship provides us with incalculable gifts and divine protection. Bahá'u'lláh affirms that "*in it there are benefits and wisdoms beyond the ken of anyone but God, the Omniscient, the All-Informed.*"[4]

Upon declaration of one's faith, every Bahá'í from the age of 15 onwards is called to observe this law, regardless of profession or financial condition. This is not a mere exercise in accounting, but rather a source of spiritual transformation. It is "*an indispensable discipline: it brings one's priorities into balance, purifies wealth, offers protection against the forces of materialism, and ensures that the share which is the Right of God contributes to the greater good.*"[5] Whether or not a believer is obliged to make a payment, the regular practice of examining one's life, of thoughtfully reflecting on one's economic choices and of considering how wealth is acquired, utilized and distributed, enables each Bahá'í to gain greater spiritual awareness and strengthen our individual connection with the Covenant.

This disciplined and deliberate approach to life is part of a broader pattern of collective action in which believers and institutions alike strive to learn, to act with greater consciousness, and to refine our efforts, through reflection and consultation. In this same spirit, the Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has continued to evolve in capacity and coherence. Since the establishment of the International Board of Trustees in 2005, the Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has grown rapidly, both in number and in reach. In this past year, the Universal House of Justice shared that "*members of the National and Regional Boards, previously referred to as Deputy Trustees, will henceforth be known simply as Trustees.*"[6] In Canada, the membership of the newly appointed Board of Trustees has increased from five to seven. Together with Representatives serving the regions and localities where the friends reside, the institution is learning to systematically assist a "*growing number of believers to understand the spiritual and practical aspects of the law*" and "*become more conscious of its significance*"[7], with due respect for its inherent dignity and sacred purpose.

We lovingly encourage every believer to embrace this mighty Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, a bountiful gift which is generously entrusted to each one of us, and to develop a deep sense of responsibility towards its observance in our individual and family lives. The Canadian Board of Trustees and its Representatives stand ready to assist and accompany believers of every age and economic circumstance, as they develop a deeper comprehension of, and obedience to, this law. May all be enabled to partake of its inestimable spiritual benefits.

1 Universal House of Justice, 12 January 2003.

2 Universal House of Justice, 21 June 2016 to the International Board of Trustees.

3 Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1991 to the Bahá'ís of the world.

4 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 97.

5 International Board of Trustees, 17 December 2017.

6 Universal House of Justice, 27 November 2025, to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

7 International Board of Trustees, 17 December 2025.

With eager anticipation, we look forward to witnessing how this practice will become more seamlessly woven into the pattern of our individual and collective lives and will contribute to the vitality of our communities across Canada. To this end, and with the hope of a more prosperous world that benefits all its peoples, we offer our humble and ardent prayers.

With loving greetings,

The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada

# Letter from the delegates of the 76th National Convention

To the Universal House of Justice,

26 April 2026.

Dear beloved Universal House of Justice,

We write to convey our heartfelt devotion as we advance in unison along the course you have illumined for us at the start of the second, greater phase of the Nine Year Plan. The 76th Canadian National Convention was characterized by a heightened level of maturity and focus, anchored by countless experiences of working to build vibrant communities across the country. We were conscious of the intimate relationship between these efforts and the advancing work to construct Canada's National House of Worship. Our hearts were uplifted by the presence and contributions of our two dear Counsellors, Mr. Ayafor Temengye Ayafor and Dr. Borna Noureddin, and our deliberations were guided by the detailed preparations made by our loving National Spiritual Assembly. We were further enriched by an address from the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and the presence of Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri and Mrs. Vida Javaheri, alongside members of the Auxiliary Board and observers visiting from across the country.

Our deliberations were elevated by an expanding consciousness of this moment in history, at the inception of the sixth epoch of the Formative Age. Drawing on your invitation in the Riḍván 2026 letter, we reflected on the conversations we are having with ever-widening circles of friends and neighbours, detailing examples and experiences that illustrate how we are learning to cultivate a way of life patterned on the divine teachings. We were lovingly brought into the confidence of the National Spiritual Assembly as we were prompted to reflect on how we imagine our community: what does it mean to be open to all? Who is the 'we' that is acting as a community in this Plan? We grappled with the implications of new realities emerging across the country where broader participation in Bahá'í community life is creating new pathways to enrolment. As people cross the threshold and express their faith through action, this prompts a deeper reflection on how we think about our identity and aspirations.

As our attention turned to the role of our institutions, we tried to view them as tending to an ecosystem of learning. They are striving to gather and disseminate knowledge, anticipate future directions, and furnish the means by which the community will advance. Our vision of the country and the task at hand was enhanced by the presence of maps that were visible throughout the Convention hall, depicting the next frontiers of growth. We were energized by the prospect of cultivating and extending learning processes that connect reservoir clusters with adjoining ones.

Throughout the Convention we heard stories of enkindled souls, drawing on the institute to navigate challenges and instill hope in the face of adversity. We were uplifted by experiences in several corners of the country where countless youth, including many Indigenous friends, have taken steps towards Bahá'u'lláh and are charting new paths of service. Story after story revealed the multitude of ways in which the city of the heart can be opened to Bahá'u'lláh's message, creating havens to shelter young and old alike from the turmoil of a world in transition.

Prayer and devotion permeated the gathering to elect our National Spiritual Assembly, and every delegate in attendance was stirred by the atmosphere of the room. One hundred and seventy-one ballots were cast in an environment of profound reverence, rendering universal participation in the election. We were fortified by the sacred nature of our collective task, and it reinforced our firm sense of hope when the condition of the world appears perilous.

Our beloved sisters and brothers in the Cradle of the Faith were never far from our hearts and minds. Throughout the Convention, delegates spoke movingly about inspiration drawn from their sacrifice and resilience.

We depart the Convention galvanized by a clarity of purpose and resolve to broaden our vision to encompass the transformation of nations within Canada—swift to act, eager to learn. We wish once more to express the abiding love and deep gratitude each one of us feels for the unceasing love, guidance, and prayers of the Universal House of Justice.

– Delegates to the 76th Canadian Bahá'í National Convention

# Response from the Universal House of Justice

To the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 26 May 2026.

We were happy to receive the moving message from the delegates at your National Convention. It recalled to us the Master's assurance that this Cause "belongeth not to the material world". The spirit that is manifest in the clear and hopeful vision with which the Canadian community has entered the second phase of the Nine Year Plan bears witness to this. May this powerful vision of a transformative way of life, now being experienced by an ever-widening circle of friends, enrich the conversations they hold, the friendships they forge, and the services they render together in pursuit of their shared aims. May it intensify their thirst for learning and be of benefit to all who encounter this community of purpose. Be assured of our prayers in the Holy Shrines for the dear friends in Canada that their endeavours may continue to advance in strength and joy.

– The Universal House of Justice



The Seat of the Universal House of Justice.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community

# About this issue

The title of this issue is "A sense of common endeavour," drawn from the Universal House of Justice's 31 December 2025 message. This message offers insights as the worldwide Bahá'í community entered the second, greater phase of the Nine Year Plan this past Ridván. A national institutional meeting took place in April to review Canada's progress, particularly with regards to the growing number of third-milestone clusters, followed closely by the National Convention.

In third milestone clusters, "a pronounced community spirit can increasingly be felt among all those involved in the pattern of activity…often expressed as a feeling of belonging and a sense of common endeavour and mutual support."[1] Both national gatherings grappled with questions about the identity of this expanding community, particularly as more friends involved in the pattern of activity show, in both words and deeds, Faith in Bahá'u'lláh and a desire to participate in all dimensions of Bahá'í life.

The feature article of this issue provides an overview of this year's National Convention, building on the idea of the "expanding we" and including a selection of photos previously shared online. Canada is moving into this new phase of the Plan with joy and confidence.

Naturally, many stories were shared at these gatherings, some of which touched on new frontiers of growth. One example in this issue is "School leadership champions junior youth programme," which describes how the junior youth programme quickly became embedded in the school environment, with 72 participants each week. In this case, the school community saw the expansion of the programme as a natural extension of caring for the well-being of all.

And what better common endeavour is there than world peace, grounded in the principle of the oneness of humanity? In the *From the History* section, the article "'Abdu'l-Bahá: Champion of Universal Peace," originally published on *The Bahá'í World* website, examines 'Abdu'l-Bahá's approach to peace and highlights North America's role as a recipient of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*.

In the article about the Northern Gates cluster in Alberta, we share an example of how clusters in Canada are reaching the third milestone of development, often with support from reservoir clusters. In the case of Northern Gates, a team of travelling teachers from nearby Edmonton built on strengths within the cluster to help a group of families in a neighbourhood come together around their children's education.

In its 31 December 2025 message, the Universal House of Justice also highlights advances at the level of culture within third milestone clusters. The article "Equality of women and men: an ongoing, generational process" describes how youth in Sudbury, Ont., are learning to put this principle into practice and, in doing so, create environments conducive to spiritual growth. Reading reality, these friends shared, involves listening to others' experiences with an open heart.

An article from Longueuil, Que., shares an experience related to youth enrolment. For the youth themselves, it often means continuing what they are already doing as they deepen their understanding of the connection between the community-building efforts they've been engaged in and the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

From the national to the regional to the local, the article "Youth strengthen bonds of friendship through cooking" focuses on the Ruddington neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont. These youth demonstrate the importance of friendship and collaboration as they band together to cook. Soon, as they reach out to neighbours to share treats, they bring more into the circle of friends.

In its response to delegates from the National Convention, the House of Justice praised Canada's "clear and hopeful" vision. In its 31 December 2025 message, it stated that "Bright horizons beckon." During these fruitful summer months, these plans are in full force; we look forward to sharing more soon.

1 From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 31 December 2025.

## Submitting stories to *Bahá'í Canada*

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



'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of friends in Stuttgart, Germany, 4 April 1913.
Photo: Bahá'í International Community

# 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Champion of Universal Peace

The following excerpts are from an article by Hoda Mahmoudi and Janet Khan, originally published on *The Bahá'í World* website.

Keenly aware of the events transpiring in the world at large, 'Abdu'l-Bahá viewed the establishment of universal peace as one of the most critical issues of the day. His writings and public talks outline the Bahá'í approach to peace and methods for its attainment and explain and illuminate the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. They reflect a profound and sensitive understanding of the state of the world and demonstrate the relevance of the Bahá'í teachings to the alleviation of the human condition. The Bahá'í approach stresses a reliance on the constructive power of religion and on the forces of social and spiritual cohesion as a way to impact the world.[1]

'Abdu'l-Bahá saw in World War I a harrowing lesson of the human necessity for peace – and of the darkness that can ensue without peace. He knew and wrote extensively that nothing short of the establishment of the spiritual foundations for peace could result in lasting

1 For a detailed discussion of the Bahá'í teachings on peace, see Hoda Mahmoudi and Janet A. Khan. A World Without War: 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Discourse for Global Peace (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2020).

peace and security for humanity. In His written works, 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly draws our attention to the need for establishing the spiritual prerequisites for peace, requisites which, in turn, remove the barriers to peace, such as racial prejudice, sexism, economic inequalities, sectarianism, and nationalism.

That remarkable time in the history of the world provides the backdrop to the *Tablets of the Divine Plan,* a series of letters 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America. A study of these letters together with two detailed letters[2] on peace addressed to the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague provides an opportunity to better understand the nature of universal peace as envisioned in the Bahá'í writings, the prerequisites of peace, and how peace can be waged. The *Tablets of the Divine Plan* set out a systematic strategy aimed at strengthening embryonic Bahá'í communities, founded on the principle of the oneness of humankind, and mobilizing their members to engage in activities associated with spreading the values of peace. The Tablets to The Hague are examples from among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tireless efforts to contribute to the most relevant discourses of His time and to engage like-minded individuals and groups throughout the world in the pursuit of peace.[3]

## A power of implementation

'Abdu'l-Bahá's caveat that "the power of thought" depends on "its manifestation in action,"[4] is particularly relevant to the idea of peace. Consider! Nearly 20 million men, women and children were killed during the four years of World War I!

'Abdu'l-Bahá took the principles of global peace revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and shaped them into a practical grand strategy for how to understand, practice, and pursue peace. Among the voluminous writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the fourteen letters of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* outlined detailed instructions and systematic actions for the spread of the spiritual teachings of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world. Their aim was the establishment of growing communities throughout the world that would embody the values of peace, would comprise the diverse populations of the human family, and would contribute to the spiritualization of the planet—a vision that was being promoted as the world was witnessing the horrors and sufferings of the war:

> Black darkness is enshrouding all regions… all countries are burning with the flame of dissension… the fire of war and carnage is blazing throughout the East and the West. Blood is flowing, corpses bestrew the ground, and severed heads are fallen on the dust of the battlefield.[5]

'Abdu'l-Bahá called on the recipients of the Tablets to arise and take action, establishing throughout the planet new communities founded on the spiritual principles of love, goodwill, and cooperation among humankind. Through such calls for acts of sacrificial service that arising to spread the divine teachings would entail, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was promoting an antidote to the social and spiritual illnesses that contribute to the conditions of war. He reminded the recipients of His letters of the power of spiritual forces to transform hatred, division, war, and destruction into love, unity, dignity, and the nobility of every human being. "Extinguish this fire," He wrote, "so that these dense clouds which obscure the horizon may be scattered, the Sun of Reality shine forth with the rays of conciliation, this intense gloom be dispelled and the resplendent light of peace shed its radiance upon all countries."[6].

'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that if we desire peace in the world, we must begin by planting peace in our own hearts. This principle can be found throughout the writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

> What is preferable in the sight of God is that the cities of men's hearts, which are ruled by the hosts of self and passion, should be subdued by the sword of utterance, of wisdom and of understanding. Thus, whoso seeketh to assist God must, before all else, conquer, with the sword of inner meaning and explanation, the city of his own heart and guard it from the remembrance of all save God, and only then set out to subdue the cities of the hearts of others.[7]

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá sought to mobilize the Bahá'ís of North America to spread the unifying message of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world, He also pursued numerous opportunities to introduce into the discourses of His time essential concepts and principles that would help the thinking of His contemporaries to evolve and assist humanity to move towards the realization of peace.

Indeed, in His letters to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, written in 1919 and 1920 after the war's conclusion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gently but unequivocally challenged His audience to broaden its conception of peace. Specifically, in His first letter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explored "many teachings which supplemented and supported that of universal peace," such as the "independent investigation of reality," "the oneness of the world of humanity," and "the equality of women and men." Some other related teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that were explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá included the following: "that religion must be the cause of fellowship and love," "that religion must be in conformity with science and reason," "that religious, racial, political, economic and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity," and "that although material civilization is one of the

2 Tablets to the Hague. Available at www.bahai.org/r/188605710.

3 Mahmoudi and Khan, *World Without War.*

4 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/361617663.

5 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/713519310.

6 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/577240123.

7 Bahá'u'lláh. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/581531547.

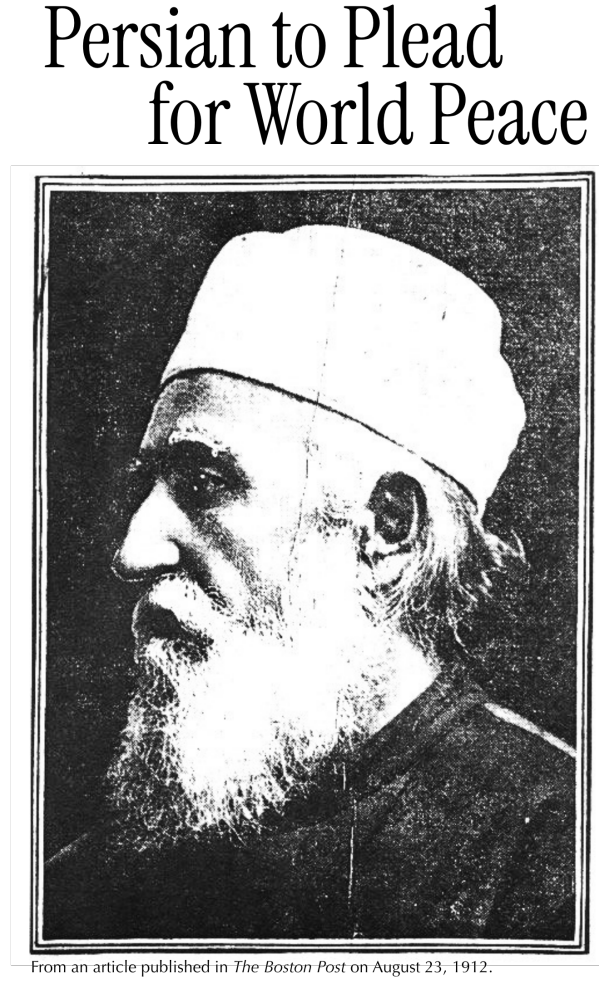
means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained."[8] 'Abdu'l-Bahá then reiterated His point, stating:

> These manifold principles, which constitute the greatest basis for the felicity of mankind and are of the bounties of the Merciful, must be added to the matter of universal peace and combined with it, so that results may accrue.[9]

In the Second Tablet to the Hague, 'Abdu'l-Bahá observed that for peace to be realized in the world, it would not be enough that people were simply informed about the horrors of war. "Today the benefits of universal peace are recognized amongst the people, and likewise the harmful effects of war are clear and manifest to all," wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

> But in this matter, knowledge alone is far from sufficient: A power of implementation is needed to establish it throughout the world.… It is our firm belief that the power of implementation in this great endeavour is the penetrating influence of the Word of God and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit.[10]

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserted that it is through this power of implementation that "the compelling power of conscience can be awakened, so that this lofty ideal may be translated from the realm of thought into that of reality." "It is clear and evident," He explained, "that the execution of this mighty endeavour is impossible through ordinary human feelings but requireth the powerful sentiments of the heart to transform its potential into reality."[11]




From an article published in *The Boston Post* on August 23, 1912.
Photo: Bahá'í International Community

## Strategic plan for the achievement of peace

'Abdu'l-Bahá dedicated His life to the advancement of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and to the establishment of universal peace. His peace activities in the West include many talks given in Europe and North America. He had close contact with civic leaders and social activists and participated in the 1912 Lake Mohonk Conference on Peace and Arbitration in upstate New York attended by over 180 prominent people from the United States and other countries. He addressed a variety of American women's organizations, gave presentations at universities and colleges, spoke in Chicago at the NAACP's annual conference, and gave lectures at churches and synagogues.

Yet for all His courageous activities, and all the efforts of the Bahá'ís, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was greatly saddened by the world's apparent indifference to Bahá'u'lláh's call for global peace and to the efforts He Himself had made in the course of His travels. Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson and His appointed successor, wrote: "Agony filled His soul at the spectacle of human slaughter precipitated through humanity's failure to respond to the summons He had issued, or to heed the warnings He had given."[12]

Given the turbulent condition of the world and the dangers facing humankind, He devised a detailed strategic plan to address the situation and to assign responsibility for its implementation. His plan, devised in 1916 to 1917 and set out in fourteen letters, known collectively as the Tablets of the Divine Plan, was entrusted to the members of the Bahá'í community in the United States and Canada. The pivotal goal of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* is directly associated with the long- range process that will lead to the achievement of peace in the world as envisaged in Bahá'u'lláh's writings.

Designated as "the chosen trustees and principal executors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan,"[13] the North American Bahá'ís were called upon to assume a prominent role in taking the message of Bahá'u'lláh to all the countries of

8 'Abdu'l-Bahá. First Tablet to the Hague. Available at www.bahai.org/r/551373700.

9 'Abdu'l-Bahá. First Tablet to the Hague. Available at www.bahai.org/r/376814060.

10 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Second Tablet to the Hague. Available at www.bahai.org/r/705335105.

11 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Second Tablet to the Hague. Available at www.bahai.org/r/705335105.

12 Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/986414751.

13 Shoghi Effendi. *This Decisive Hour.* Available at www.bahai.org/r/194317153

the world and for effecting the transformation in values necessary for the emergence of a world order characterized by justice, unity, and peace. This great human resource – the body of willing believers in the West – was notable for its enthusiasm, determination, and deep commitment to Bahá'u'lláh's vision for change. These communities were ideal incubators for the processes of peace.

At the time the messages of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were being written, North American Bahá'ís comprised but a small percentage of the total Bahá'ís in the world (though many had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912).

*Commenting on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's choice of the North American Bahá'ís and the link between World War I and the Tablets of the Divine Plan, Shoghi Effendi indicated that the Divine Plan "was prompted by the contact established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself, in the course of His historic journey, with the entire body of His followers throughout the United States and Canada."*

It was conceived, soon after that contact was established, in the midst of what was then held to be one of the most devastating crises in human history."[14] Shoghi Effendi offered further comment concerning the historic bond between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the North American community: "This is the community," he reminded us,

> which, ever since it was called into being through the creative energies released by the proclamation of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, was nursed in the lap of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unfailing solicitude, and was trained by Him to discharge its unique mission through the revelation of innumerable Tablets, through the instructions issued to returning pilgrims, through the despatch of special messengers, through His own travels at a later date, across the North American continent, through the emphasis laid by Him on the institution of the Covenant in the course of those travels, and finally through His mandate embodied in the Tablets of the Divine Plan.[15]

It is clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was aware of the potential capacity of the North American Bahá'ís to carry out the task with which they had been entrusted. His extensive travels in North America afforded the opportunity to assess, at first hand, the spiritual, social, and political environment of the continent and to appreciate the freedoms – intellectual, artistic, political, and, particularly, the religious freedom— inherent in North American society. And it is also apparent that He understood the spiritual possibilities of the West and the desire of women and men to seek a fuller expression of all things – of themselves, of their society, of the world.

- Hoda Mahmoudi and Janet Khan

Read the full article on *The Bahá'í World* website, www.bahaiworld.bahai.org.

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14 Shoghi Effendi. *This Decisive Hour*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/257510249.

15 Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*. Available at www.bahai.org/r/256927469.









# “An Expanding We”: The 76th Bahá’í National Convention

Representatives from across Canada gathered in a consultative space that generated a vision of the progress of the Nine Year Plan in their country, and elected the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year.

From April 23-26, 159 delegates gathered—from St. John’s, N.L., to Vancouver Island, B.C., to Arviat, Nunavut—with firm hope for Canada’s future. In an atmosphere characterized by united endeavour and a sense of trust, they consulted and cast ballots to elect the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada for the coming year.

On a wave of joy at having received the Ridván Message a few days earlier, the delegates shared how, in localities across the country, the community—an expanding “we”—is arising as a protagonist, building havens of peace inspired by Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings.

The National Assembly guided the consultation and noted that Canada has undergone a shift in perspective over the last four years: we no longer think about growth from the top down, but from a grassroots perspective, as institutional arrangements respond to the kind of growth occurring, while extending a vision to embrace all.

In addition to the delegates, the presence and contributions of Canada’s two resident Counsellors, Mr. Ayafor Temengye Ayafor and Dr. Borna Noureddin, enriched the Convention. The deliberations were elevated by an address from the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada and the presence of Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri and Mrs. Vida Javaheri, as well as members of the Auxiliary Board and observers visiting from across the country.

This year’s National Convention took place two weeks after a nation-











al institutional meeting that analyzed how far Canada has come at the halfway point of this Nine Year Plan, the overall vision of which is to release the society-building power of the Faith. The perspective that emerged from examining the frontiers of learning in Canada, alongside member of the International Teaching Centre Mrs. Antonella Demonte, was carried forward into the Convention.

The National Assembly acknowledged Canada's efforts to raise up its National House of Worship. In its annual report, it stated: "[W]e are acutely aware of the mutual elements of a single divine project underway, as the work to erect Canada's House of Worship accelerates alongside the efforts of the friends to raise up a new Canada. The first, historic, concrete steps—indeed, in some respects a breaking of ground—have been taken, as preparations begin to upgrade Leslie Street and create a new pedestrian path leading to the Temple site."

A thread in the Convention stemming from the Ridván message was the relationship between the three protagonists of the Plan—the community, the institutions and the

individual. Much has been learned about what it means for the community to emerge as a protagonist. Dr. Noureddin helped the Convention reflect on how the three protagonists are interrelated, and we cannot explore one without the others.

The questions "what does it mean to be open to all?" and "who is the 'we' that is acting as a community in this Plan?" were identified and explored by the delegates. A delegate from Richmond, B.C., said, "Families are initiating service projects and feel they are part of a global community. Their language is changing. They don't say the Bahá'ís are organizing this or that. They say we are organizing…"

The Convention grappled with the concept of enrolment and discussed what has been learned about the journey of newly confirmed believers—those who have crossed the threshold— and this "singular moment in a person's spiritual development."[1] "How to recognize when the city of the heart is open,"[2] and how institutions can identify barriers to enrolment, as well as affirmations in both word and deed, was also a topic of consultation, considering, for example, the role of the Nineteen Day Feast and elections.

A delegate from Edmonton, Alta. shared how 13 Indigenous youth recently crossed the threshold and wanted to hold a camp to deepen on the Bahá'í Fast together while fasting for the first time. With regards to the community as a protagonist, he said, "When a population is grappling with a question, don't try to answer it for them but think about spaces where they can explore the question themselves."

The role of youth in shaping Canada's bright future came up frequently during the Convention. It was clear that spaces like conferences and camps have had a profound influence. As the House of Justice describes, these youths' endeavours are often "occurring against a backdrop of conflict and disorder, economic inequity, and deep social divisions."[3] However, as a delegate from Stratford, Ont., described, youth have shown tremendous capacity to create environments that counteract these destructive forces. They are demonstrating what it means for the community to arise as a protagonist. For example, youth in Toronto, Ont., recently opened more than 30 new pockets of activity, naturally supporting one another in this endeavour.

Maps of every region in the country were posted around the Convention Hall. Each cluster was outlined and coloured in a progressively darker shade of green depending on the

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

2 From the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 31 December 2025.

3 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2026.

















milestone it had reached. There was considerable consultation about the concept of an "ecosystem of learning" that the institutions of the Faith are "charged with tending,"[4] including groups of adjoining clusters, each with a reservoir cluster, that learn and move together. A delegate from North Cowichan, B.C., noted that "Every cluster is learning and sharing—even if not fully grown." Embracing this vision of regions is part of the "expanding we."

The role of the individual as a protagonist was also a theme discussed during the Convention. Mr. Ayafor described how it is the individual who draws the power of the Holy Spirit to a place, calling to mind Canada's pioneering goals, both national and international. The effect of the seamless educational process, which starts in childhood with children's classes all the way up to the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, is clearly transforming all three protagonists—the community, the institutions and the individual.

The election itself took place on a rainy Saturday morning. The dignified atmosphere of the election, along with the delegates' spirit of humility and devotion, was very moving. There was 100 percent participation in the election, with all 171 ballots cast. One hundred and fifty-nine delegates voted in person; 12 ballots were hand-delivered or mailed. There were also no spoiled ballots or votes.

A group of Canadian Bahá'ís serving at the Bahá'í World Centre sent photos of the gardens as they prayed for the delegates' efforts to elect the National Spiritual Assembly.

The following individuals were elected to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Nabet Fani, Hoda Farahmandpour, Ciprian Jauca, Karen McKye, and Veronica Robinson.

Delegates and observers travelled from diverse settings—urban centres, villages, suburbs and vast regions. However, through sharing experience prompted by reflection on the Ridván Message and other guidance, all were able to see possibilities and learn from one another.

A delegate from Comox Valley, B.C., shared how her cluster has been learning about having children's festivals with all the parents involved. Even though it seems as if they are only a few dozen friends working together, she realized they are in conversation with 200 people, opening possibilities. "We see ourselves in everything being said at the Convention, even though we're a small community, a small cluster," she remarked.

Some friends were also experiencing the Convention for the first time. One such delegate from Toronto, Ont., commented, "The Convention is its own institution—a truly consultative space with the delegates in consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly…It was such a reverent and prayerful space."

Another first-time delegate from Arviat, Nunavut, said, "It's rare to find spaces where people from diverse backgrounds and realities come together in a quest to learn. Much of what we see in society is people with certain agendas and personal interests, but here none of that was present."

Many of the observers, who sat in the upper hall and viewed the Convention through a livestream, were also youth. A youth from Surrey, B.C., observing Convention for the first time, shared, "I was very eager to learn about Canada as a whole nation…It reminds me that there are people across the world doing these things. There are so many insights that I can take back home. It's a joy to be here."

The theme of hope was highlighted throughout the Convention. As the



Group photo: Liam Dousti

House of Justice stated in its Ridván message, "When the world's horizons darken, hope becomes a scarce and precious resource—but one with which the community of the Greatest Name has been richly blessed because of its conviction about the future of humanity and because of what it has learned from its own experience."

Dr. Noureddin described how the capacity of the Bahá'í community to have meaningful conversations has increased, and that one of the aspects of these conversations is that they are hopeful. "Even when raising challenges and concerns, at times, our own despair comes out," he said, "What a gift to be in a conversation that, when discussing challenges, is characterized by hope."

And when a loss of hope may be the result of not knowing a way forward, the Counsellors reminded us that the city of the heart of many is open. They shared that in the olden days, there was often only one entrance into a city, but that, in modern cities, there are many ways to enter. This speaks to the receptivity in Canada today.

In an excerpt from its closing remarks, the National Spiritual Assembly stated:

"What has been striking in your comments is how communities and clusters of every kind, in every setting, are advancing together. Across the northern territories, whose vast distances and sparse population are a singular reality yet were honoured by particular mention of the beloved Master, the seeds planted over many years are sprouting—and it was moving to hear the stories of connection between two of the delegates here. The examples of how the Indigenous and French-Canadian populations are arising to advance the work of the Plan, and how the Indian community in Brampton is crowding the Feasts, were joyful. The references to the real condition of humanity—in East Hastings, in Stratford, in neighbourhoods—made it clear that while we grieve with humanity, we are not disabled by the suffering we see. While we are affected by the forces of society, we are not confused by them."

"In a world that has resigned itself to conditions of fracture and division, you, His loved ones—and those known as Bahá'ís or not—are clearing a path for the peoples of Canada, enabling them to draw nearer and nearer to the Threshold of Oneness. Swift to act, and eager to learn."









Photos: Gordon Braithwaite




Youth participants at a Ruhi Book 5 camp at Sylvan Lake, Alta.

# School leadership champions junior youth programme

In the Tamarack neighbourhood of Edmonton, Alta., what began as a simple after-school club for two junior youth has, in just over a year, blossomed into a vibrant pattern of community life.

In 2024, a young Bahá'í teacher hoped to begin working at an elementary and junior high school.[1] During a job interview, she spoke about her experience with the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme while discussing challenges faced by eighth-grade students. The principal she spoke with was very interested, seeing how it could empower the students under his charge to be active agents of change in their community. She soon secured the position, on condition that she bring the programme to the school.

The programme began modestly with two junior youth who formed an after-school club, with the teacher serving as an animator. However, from the outset, the principal encouraged the junior youth to think about everyone they knew. They thought about how to engage the entire school, and realized that service projects, a natural part of the programme, would be a way to do so. This led to all 1200 students, including all 350 junior youth in the neighbourhood, taking part in a garbage cleanup. The principal blocked out time for all classes so that they could attend. Later, they made and delivered cards for seniors.

This approach helped the junior youth programme take root, growing to 72 weekly participants. Word also spread naturally among students, teachers, and families connected to the school. Now, the junior youth naturally think about the well-being of the entire school. "Why wouldn't we include everyone?" they say when asked. However, there was an urgent need for more animators to accommodate all the junior youth.

The teacher consulted with Bahá'í institutions, and it was decided that rather than importing help, a parent gathering should be called. The question of how to work with large numbers was posed to the parents and the junior youth. It was no longer, "How do I run this programme?" but "How is our community learning to respond to its own needs?" This shift in orientation became foundational, opening possibilities that would not have emerged otherwise. Several parents stepped up to help, and together they decided that the Grade 9s—the oldest among the junior youth—would take on some of the responsibilities of animators.

In May of 2025, three high school students who frequented the basketball courts became interested in the programme and started

serving as animators. They studied Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and connected with their life's purpose, increasing their motivation to serve. Being of service had a profound impact on these youth, unlocking the programme's potential for individual and social transformation.

By October 2025, a year into the process, the Grade 9s had graduated to Grade 10 and now attended a local high school. This group of about 15 youth became the core animators. Over the course of several days, they studied the first unit of Ruhi Book 5: *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth*, deepening their understanding of the characteristics of youth. Inspired by insights gained from studying this text, they began planning summer camps for the junior youth group. They also set a goal of advancing their study of the Ruhi Institute materials so they could become tutors of the books themselves. They organized overnight camps during all of their school breaks. These youth gather every Sunday to plan, reflect, and study.

The depth of ownership and love among the animators is striking. They support one another through challenges, celebrate victories together, and have learned to consult and act as a unified body. Even during periods of disruption, such as a teacher's strike, they continued the junior youth groups with minimal adult support. Those who are unable to attend trust that their fellow animator will catch them up, while those who participate carry what they understand to be a sacred charge to advance. This has added a new layer of ownership; the institute is clearly seen as belonging to them and their community, accompanied by a shared commitment to ensure that no one is left behind.

This approach required patience. Particularly during junior youth sessions, it was sometimes difficult for the teacher not to step in with answers. It required conscious detachment, creating space for reflection, study and learning rather than direction. One example emerged when animators struggled to engage junior youth with the texts. The animators brought the issue to their weekly reflection gathering. Together, they consulted. Rather than abandoning the texts, they brainstormed ways to creatively reinforce the concepts. They developed art projects and experiential activities to help the junior youth see the purpose behind what they were studying.



As a service project, the junior youth salted the sidewalks with eco-friendly salt.

The teachers at the school were among those who recognized a transformation in students' attitudes and behaviour. One student, who had previously been frequently suspended, began to recognize when he felt overwhelmed and to regulate his behaviour, and as a result, the suspensions stopped. Teachers started recommending the programme to families facing challenges such as bullying, disengagement, fighting, and isolation. They helped make it a priority; for instance, one participant plays basketball, so his coach adjusted the team's practice times to ensure he could attend his junior youth group.

Interest in the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme soon extended beyond one school. A teacher from another school, inspired by what she observed, reached out to the principal and requested a letter outlining the programme's value. In a wholehearted letter of recommendation, the principal wrote that the programme has made a "significant and lasting contribution to the culture and student development" of the school. He noted that it provides students with "purposeful opportunities to grow into responsible, compassionate, and community-minded young people," helping them cultivate "moral awareness, thoughtful communication, and a sense of service to others."




The entire school participated in a garbage clean-up.



The youth studied Ruhi Book 4 during their Winter break.

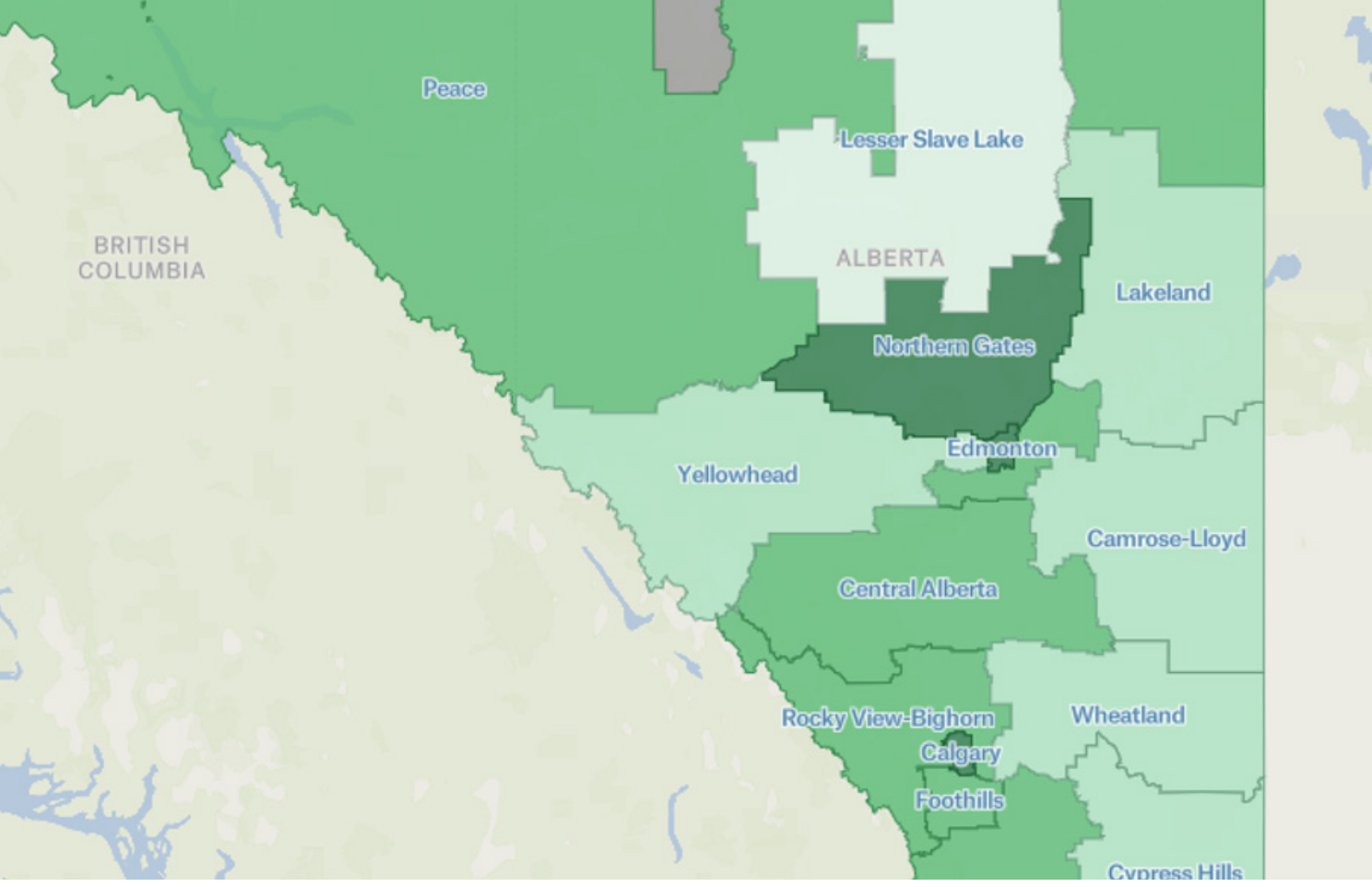


A tamarack tree recently planted on the grounds of Canada's Temple site.
Photo: Niaz Noori

This support culminated in a large end-of-year celebration, where junior youth, their families, teachers, and animators gathered to mark the year's achievements. The event was fully supported by the school and served as a visible affirmation of the value the programme had brought to the community. Certificates of appreciation, signed by the principal, recognized the spirit of service and responsibility exemplified by the junior youth and their animators.

Service projects have also matured. What began as school-based efforts, including garbage cleanups and cards for seniors, expanded into broader neighbourhood collaboration. The animators and junior youth contacted the Community League—a not-for-profit organization representing residents—independently and helped them organize their activities. Now the Community League is considering junior youth projects and events in its annual budget.

Much like the tamarack tree for which the community is named, this process of growth has been both steady and resilient. The tamarack is known for its unique ability to flourish in harsh climates. It is deeply rooted, flexible, and enduring through changing seasons. In much the same way, what began as a fragile seed with just two junior youth developed strong roots in Tamarack's soil. The programme has grown branches that now shelter many. As new cohorts arise and families become increasingly engaged, the pattern of growth continues, season after season.




A map showing clusters in Alberta. The dark green clusters have passed the third milestone of development.

# Northern Gates cluster in Alberta reaches the third milestone

This narrative demonstrates how capacities gained in third milestone clusters can be swiftly disseminated to surrounding clusters with a solid foundation for growth.

The Northern Gates cluster is a vast geographic area fanning out north from Edmonton, Alta. The largest municipality, St. Albert—a 30-minute drive from central Edmonton—has about 50 Bahá'ís, with about a dozen youth, junior youth and children.

Historically, this community has been active in organizing events that celebrate unity in diversity, interfaith cooperation, and International Women's Day. On one occasion, the mayor was surprised to learn there were only 50 Bahá'ís, as he thought there were many more based on these events! However, it proved challenging to engage these networks and contacts in an ongoing community-building process.

In 2022, during the wave of global conferences at the outset of this Nine Year Plan, a retired English teacher was inspired to expand her vision of what was possible. She wanted to serve the immigrant population in her community and began to use the Bahá'í-inspired junior youth texts in her tutoring. She also connected with a newcomer centre, where she started teaching English.

The teacher found that, in addition to strengthening their English language skills, the families she was engaging with wanted to connect to a community and be part of something meaningful, especially the youth. She decided to host a devotional gathering for these families. In a joyful atmosphere, they discussed spiritual principles relevant to their lives.

Through these conversations, the families identified a real need for their children and junior youth to receive a spiritual education. They wanted them to develop friendships to combat isolation and build a community where diverse families, such as those of Ukrainian and Turkish origin, could come together in meaningful service.

However, although she began a Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* study circle, the English teacher did not feel that she had the time to start this process alone. Many of the families lived in the same housing complex in a family-oriented and relatively affluent area. The potential was there, but a lack of human resources and intensity was a barrier. In September, a study of guidance with the Counsellor helped the regional institutions understand how clusters advance from one milestone to the next. One strength of the process in the Northern Gates cluster was the friends' ability to sustain educational activities among networks of friends. The institutions now saw an opportunity to learn about this process in a neighbourhood setting. They decided to invite a resource team from a more advanced cluster to help residents of the housing complex build their capacity to carry out activities.

Several young adults from Edmonton formed a team, and a meeting was soon arranged with families from the housing complex to get to know them and learn about their community's aspirations. The group of mothers discussed the spiritual education of their children and decided to start a class using the Ruhi Institute curriculum. They considered the best way to invite families and clearly communicate the purpose of the class, and decided to hold it in a neutral community space.

The mothers contacted their housing complex manager to book the meeting room, but there was a fee. After speaking without success to a manager about removing the cost, a mother wrote a beautiful email to the management about the importance of building a vibrant community and engaging the children of the neighbourhood in these classes. They were eventually able to secure a meeting room without charge due to her efforts.

The mothers read through the first lesson of Grade 1 with the resource team and began consulting about how best to teach it and invite other children. One of the mothers, who was a trained preschool teacher in Ukraine, thought she could teach with assistance. Later, because teaching her own children proved challenging, she enlisted her neighbour's 15-year-old daughter to help. An individual from the resource team also teaches the class, and another animates a junior youth group studying the text *Walking the Straight Path.*

Currently, there are about 10 children in the class. The resource team meets with the mothers every week to plan, and they usually take this opportunity to study sections from Ruhi Book 3: *Teaching Children's Classes*. The families demonstrated ownership of the process in other ways, such as by organizing a fundraiser to buy materials. They also reach out to new families weekly to invite them to the class.

The community-building process in the housing complex in St. Albert was only one element of reaching the third milestone; there was already strong universal participation in the cluster. However, it demonstrates how Edmonton—the reservoir cluster—effectively supported an adjoining cluster. There were seeds of something strong underway, and a few missing capacities or skills were gained quickly with assistance. This is only one of many examples of how clusters are moving at this halfway point of the Nine Year Plan.



Lino print. Artist: Esther Maloney



Youth from Sudbury, Ont., at a Ruhi camp.

# Equality of women and men: an ongoing, generational process

Bahá'í Canada spoke with three young men about their experience putting the principle of gender equality into practice at a recent camp.

In Canada, young people can often consider gender equality as a worthy yet abstract concept that does not affect them personally. This belief was challenged when a group of six youth in Sudbury, Ont.—three young women and three young men, all 21 or 22 years old, examined their own social reality.

These youth, all serving as tutors and junior youth animators in their locality, had gathered to prepare, both spiritually and practically, for an upcoming week-long overnight camp. They were thinking about how to create an environment conducive to spiritual and intellectual growth, as 38 participants aged 15-18 would soon gather to study courses from the Ruhi Institute. These camps are havens for the youth. Often, the negative social forces they wish to address in their communities are remedied here first.

Before the camp, the youth tutors, assisted by an Auxiliary Board member, studied the 19 March 2025 letter from the Universal House of Justice regarding family life and marriage. What stood out to them among the Bahá'í principles applicable to family life was the principle of the equality of women and men.

The letter states, "[C]ertain gender roles that characterized an early stage of human development could eventually impede the advancement of women and of society at another…A challenge for Bahá'í communities worldwide, then, is to examine the present practices in their societies, weigh them in light of the Teachings, weed out any undesirable tendencies, and learn to establish new patterns of family life suited to the needs of a new age."

The youth found the concepts in the message to be very relevant to both the kind of environment they wished to create at the camp and in their greater community. The statements, "[G]irls and boys will be raised with a new understanding of equality and its practical expression. The ramifications of this principle will thus gradually extend to future generations…" were a source of

inspiration in their endeavours, as the youth—both tutors and participants—serve those younger than themselves.

While studying this letter, the female tutors were encouraged to share how current social norms and practices have negatively impacted them. This frank and vulnerable conversation revealed that gender equality has not yet been achieved, which has a very real and prevalent influence on the lives of young people.

This conversation led to a leap in consciousness among the tutors, particularly the young men, Simi, Eli and Josiah. Simi said, "For me, it was very eye-opening because I knew that there was inequality against women, but it wasn't very conscious in my mind…I thought it was something that happens in the news and not next to me." It also gave them a sense of urgency regarding the issue.

When reading their own reality in light of this principle, the youths' reflections focused on the social dynamics they observed. They discussed how men could be dismissive of women, backing each other up, without considering the truth. This can cause young women to minimize the issues they experience. The youth thought that there was an oversexualization of both genders, often through comments that go unchecked, with women's worth being based on the male gaze. They also noticed that during the camps, the authority of the women tutors was not taken as seriously as that of the men, and that the women volunteered to do tasks like washing the dishes more often. There was also a realization that aggression is not only physical but can also manifest itself in language, and that the women around them had a lesser sense of safety than they did.

These assumptions and dynamics, Eli describes, "Can create cultures of men versus women, which lead to disunity. This makes it hard to consult and arrive at a spiritual truth together. It's very difficult to enact justice. It's difficult for each person, especially women, to feel like they're thriving and growing when others put them down. It's difficult to focus on the spiritual aspects of life when others are focused on your physical characteristics. These tendencies can create negative feelings in both women and men, such as anger and sadness. A spiritual environment requires joy to fulfill its potential."

Josiah spoke about how years of consultation, action and reflection among the tutors had prepared the group to address these issues at camp. They knew how to act "as the fingers of one hand,"—a quote from Bahá'u'lláh that Josiah kept going back to when describing how the youth tutors, men and women, worked as a team, which had a "good dynamic of trust."

The tutors made a collective agreement to address these dynamics when they came up in a spirit of loving encouragement. Eli explains, "When we hear something, we're going to address it immediately. And sometimes that takes courage, but it's what's necessary for the spiritual growth of these youth." Simi explains, "Not one person makes decisions. Everyone consulted on the spot and then made quick decisions about what could happen."

They resisted the tendency to argue or prove a point. Eli explains, "When we are considering the spiritual growth of a population, it makes it very easy for anyone to agree that this needs to be addressed…A desire for justice and to see spiritual growth removes the self from these issues."

"The men need to act as role models and help guide the younger men to become more aware of these issues," Eli continues, "They can just get into arguments about these things, and arguments don't lead to a shift in understanding."

Eli served as the tutor of a group of four younger youth for Ruhi Book 2: *Arising to Serve,* a text that prepares participants to discuss spiritual principles in their daily lives. As part of their studies, they undertook a research assignment to go around the camp and ask the women about gender inequalities in society. "I was very impressed with these boys," Eli explains, "because they actually did it, and they did it with an open mind…I think coming at it with an attitude of learning was really helpful. They collected their learnings and presented them to the camp at the end of the day."

Simi explains, "Trying to implement the principle makes us active participants in the principle. It's one thing to observe and see the problem and another to have conviction and act on it. Youth can tell if we have conviction."



Participants in the Ruhi Book 2 study circle.



A group of friends in front of the pioneer home in the Sacré-Coeur neighbourhood in Longueuil, Que.

# Crossing the threshold: learning about youth enrolment

In Longueuil, Que., friends working in a neighbourhood share their initial experience and shifts in mindset regarding two recent youth enrolments.

In the Sacré-Coeur neighbourhood in Longueuil, Que., a Bahá'í pioneer and two other youth live together in a home that serves as a centre for educational activities. One of the youth, who is from the neighbourhood, has become engaged in community building over the last two years. He recently completed Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and is currently studying Ruhi Book 2: *Arising to Serve.*

The other youth has been exposed to the Faith for many years. For him, two years ago was also a turning point, when he was invited to participate in a regional youth camp. Since then, he has studied Ruhi Books 1 through 4 and part of Book 5, has begun serving as an animator and tutor, and moved into the pioneer home to dedicate more time to service in the neighbourhood. Both youth share the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh with others and have expressed their desire to participate in more aspects of Bahá'í life, such as prayer and fasting.

Six months ago, the Local Spiritual Assembly decided to decentralize the Nineteen Day Feast, and the friends in the Sacré-Coeur neighbourhood began hosting their own Feast. Naturally, the youth living in the pioneer home were encouraged to participate. At a recent Feast, the friends discussed the upcoming unit conventions and used the opportunity to explore the Bahá'í electoral process and participation in Bahá'í elections. During this conversation, the youth from the neighbourhood who lives in the pioneer home expressed his desire to vote in the upcoming election. The friends present were unsure how to respond in the moment, but the following day, some of them reflected with their Auxiliary Board members.

Together, these friends explored the implications of the youth's wish to vote in Bahá'í elections, in light of the Universal House of Justice's statement that individuals, "viewing themselves as completely at one with the Bahá'í community, might express the desire to join the Faith through eagerness to participate in the full range of Bahá'í activities,

including those dimensions of community life that are only open to Bahá'ís, such as Nineteen Day Feasts, the Fund, or the electoral process."[1]

One of the friends, who is currently tutoring this youth in Book 2, noted that he has made it clear, in the context of their conversations in the study circle, that he recognizes Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God for today. Based on all of this, the friends concluded that the youth was ready to enrol in the Faith and that the next step was to speak with him to help him do so.

When considering the content of such a conversation, the friends found it helpful to draw on experience from a few clusters in Ontario that have been learning about youth enrolments. In particular, the idea that being part of the Bahá'í community does not entail anything different from what the youth are already doing was very helpful, as was the understanding that, through their engagement with the institute and service to their community, the youth are already walking the path set by Bahá'u'lláh for His followers, and that formal enrolment is simply another natural step along that path.

They also considered the implications of a youth enrolling and whether they would expect him to join many more spaces within the broader Bahá'í community. It became clear to the friends that a conversation with the Local Spiritual Assembly would be helpful in this regard, to avoid placing such expectations on the youth. At the same time, they wanted to encourage him to participate in spaces such as the cluster reflection meeting, where he could gradually become aware of the significance of his own efforts within a wider process of transformation unfolding beyond his neighbourhood.

The following day, after an impromptu devotional meeting among the three residents of the neighbourhood home, the Bahá'í pioneer began a conversation about enrolment with the two youth. Although only one had expressed a desire to vote, both youth had previously expressed their faith in Bahá'u'lláh through their words and deeds, so it felt appropriate to include both in the conversation. In addition to the points listed above, the conversation also touched on the nature of the Administrative Order, the role of Bahá'í institutions, and the importance of Bahá'í elections.

Gaining a deeper appreciation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order helped the youth understand why formal enrolment is important, even if they were already engaged in all other aspects of Bahá'í community life. The pioneer used the Local Spiritual Assembly as an example, explaining that because one of the Assembly's central responsibilities is to support community growth and grassroots efforts, when those engaged in this work vote, the Assembly can reflect the reality of its community.

By the end of this conversation, the youth from the neighbourhood confirmed his wish to be registered as a member of the Bahá'í community and to vote in the upcoming election. The pioneer joyfully promised to convey this to the relevant Bahá'í institutions so that he could be registered as soon as possible. As he was getting up to leave, the second youth, who had still been hesitant up to that point, asked to be enrolled as well.

1 From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 22 March 2019.




The friends created a mural that was used in a music video they made.



Cooking together has been a way to deepen friendships and sustain the junior youth programme.

# Youth strengthen bonds of friendship through cooking

Beyond meeting weekly as part of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, a youth describes how, in the Ruddington neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont., friends are creating a pattern of community life and service.

After a busy summer of activity in the neighbourhood, new ways were sought to engage junior youth further. Junior youth often socialize with their peers outside of the neighbourhood or spend time on social media. Considering that sustaining junior youth groups depends on how animators complement the study of the texts with artistic activities, social interaction, and service projects, this became a topic of consultation.

The aim was to create a space where junior youth could socialize more freely, interact with older youth, and potentially learn a life skill. When the junior youth consulted about their interests, several suggestions were made, but cooking together was the most popular choice.

The cooking group includes two youth in university and one in high school who serve as junior youth animators, another high school youth who serves as a children's class teacher and six junior youth. Each week, everyone meets at one of the apartment buildings to cook and then gathers for a short devotional because what's a gathering without prayers! The junior youth choose their own prayers, often in different languages, and lead the devotionals.

So far, we made lasagna, burritos, apple pie, Tteokbokki (a Korean stir-fried rice cake), Persian kebab and rice, Persian pastry with honey and saffron, shortbread cookies and shepherd's pie. Over time, it became clear that keeping the group small ensured smoother collaboration in the kitchen because too many chefs in the kitchen was a recipe for disaster.

Both junior youth and youth make consistent efforts to attend the cooking sessions, sometimes more than their own respective junior youth groups! The space offered an environment for youth of all ages to offer insights and advice derived from their own life experiences in a calm, comfortable environment devoid of pressure, parental or peer. Questions about school and

other topics flow easily because the youth attended the same middle and high schools as the junior youth. The conversations are elevated, and the junior youth and youth bond in unexpected ways. The relative closeness in age between youth animators and junior youth allows for a more meaningful connection. While the junior youth study sessions offer important structure, the cooking space provides a unique intimacy.

Participation in the weekly study groups has also improved. Junior youth attend more regularly and share more openly. Sometimes, after cooking, the space also allows junior youth to catch up on missed lessons.

Over time, the parents began supporting the cooking initiative and offered suggestions as to how we can be of service. One parent of a junior youth suggested that, rather than making food for us alone, we could use it as an opportunity to make goodies for our neighbours.

The mother of one of the youth found a recipe for shortbread cookies, recruited her husband to print it for the youth, and made ingredient labels for the goodie bags. A trial of this idea was tested one weekend by making a few dozen cookies and handing them out door-to-door to neighbours in the apartment building. Everyone who was visited welcomed the surprise treat and impromptu visit.

Two weeks later, we did it again, this time with the mother of a child in the children's class. The mother of one of the junior youth also joined, so she could learn the recipe. They both helped to make a baklava-style treat. This time, neighbours were asked, "Do you know anyone you would like to give a cookie to?" Some of the parents came along to deliver cookies to previously unknown homes. The question created new opportunities for connection, and that day we quickly ran out of treats!

The initiative continues to evolve, and it has been a great learning process. Of course, sometimes not everyone is available, as the participants are students, occasional scheduling adjustments are necessary. The junior youth programme isn't just about the study sessions; it's about the social interaction that complements it, and which fosters bonding between the youth and junior youth. This, in addition to praying together, really brings to light the transformative power of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. Through simple yet meaningful activities, the space has opened unique opportunities for conversations, and the hope is that it will prove even more fruitful in the future as we embark on acts of service of even greater complexity.

- Amin Paltoo





## NATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

**National Spiritual Assembly**
Secretariat: secretariat@bahai.ca
Phone: 905-889-8168 Fax: 905-889-8184

**Treasury:** treasury@bahai.ca
**Bahá'í Canada Committee:** bahaicanada@bahai.ca
**National and Unit Conventions:** conventions@bahai.ca
**Office of Public Affairs:** publicaffairs@bahai.ca
**Records Department:** records@bahai.ca

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

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

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

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

The Local Fund (only through a Local Spiritual Assembly or online)

The National Fund
The Deputization Fund
The Continental Fund
The Community Properties Fund
The International Bahá'í Development Fund
Humanitarian Relief Fund
The North American House of Worship Fund
The International Collaboration Fund
The International Fund
The World Centre Endowment Fund
The Canadian Temple Fund

## REGIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

### INSTITUTE BOARDS

**British Columbia and the Yukon**
institute@bc.bahai.ca

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ibsecretary@ab.bahai.ca

**Saskatchewan and Manitoba**
rib@skmb.bahai.ca

**Ontario**
instituteboard@ontariobahai.org

**Quebec**
secretariat@institut.bahaiqc.org

**Atlantic Provinces**
institute.board@atlantic.bahai.ca

### BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS

**British Columbia**
PO Box 2871 Vancouver Main
Vancouver, BC, V6B 3X4
council@bc.bahai.ca
236-594-8081

**Alberta**
PO Box 38020
Shoppers Drug Mart #0373
725-500 Country Hills Blvd NE
Calgary, AB, T3K 4Y0
bcasecretary@ab.bahai.ca

**Saskatchewan and Manitoba**
521 McMillan Ave.
Winnipeg, MB, R3L 0N4
rbc@skmb.bahai.ca

**Ontario**
7200 Leslie St.
Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8
council@ontariobahai.org
647-479-8650

**Quebec**
84 Ch Juniper
Chelsea, QC, J9B 1T3
secretariat@conseil.bahaiqc.org
819-743-7778

**Atlantic Provinces**
313 Arcona St. Summerside, PE,
C1N 2X1
regional.council@atlantic.bahai.ca
902-439-7263

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Purchase Bahá'í books online** in English and French: https://distribution.bahai.ca/
Email: bds@bahai.ca
Phone: 905-889-8168

**For inquires regarding Bahá'í books in French**, contact
75 d'auteuil Street, Québec, QC, G1R 4C3
Email: sdbc@bahai.ca
Phone: 418-692-2402

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

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

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

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

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

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

# The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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

## ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH PAYMENT INFORMATION

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

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

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

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

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

خزانه دار هیأت امنای حقوق الله رسید وجوه دریافت شده را که در عین حال رسید مالیاتی نیز محسوب میگردد برای فرستنده ارسال خواهند داشت. تقدیم کنندگان حقوق الله میتوانند از این رسید ها در زمان تهیهء اوراق مالیاتی استفاده نمایند. در روی چک، حوالهء بانکی یا پستی باید عبارت Canadian Bahá'í Fund -- Ḥuqúqu'lláh ذکر شود. شمارهء تسجیل بهائی نیز باید در هر پرداخت قید گردد. از چندی پیش امکان پرداخت حقوق الله از طریق سایت اینترنتی https://member.bahai.ca/member/ 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.**