

"Blessed is the spot..... where mention of God hath been made"

TEACHING NEWS BULLETIN

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL TEACHING COMMITTEE

Teaching Bulletin - No.3.

PUBLIC MEETINGS.

Purpose.

In general Public Meetings serve a three-fold purpose:

1. To publicize the Faith in a new area and attract the initial contacts in that area.
2. To fulfil a growing need of the older contacts to hear further aspects of the Faith by way of the varying types of Public Meetings, e.g. Brains Trust, Symposium, Devotional, Illustrated Talk, etc.
3. To lend a certain prestige to the Group, the speaker, and the Cause in that town by demonstrating a nation-wide organization of the Cause in Britain.

Public Meetings Not Confirmatory.

Public Meetings are not considered to be a method of confirming people in the Cause. Valuable though they are for attracting new enquirers to hear of the Faith, it is the exceptional Public Meeting and the rare speaker only, which are capable of engendering the spirit of confirmation in the enquirer.

The spirit of Baha'i fellowship can be demonstrated at a Public Meeting; follow-up literature can be given or sold, certain major questions can be answered; and the enquirer's interest deepened sufficiently that he will desire further

knowledge of the Cause. However, an individual who has only attended Public Meetings and has had no further or closer contact with the Faith or the friends can hardly be expected to know enough about the Faith or to be sufficiently affected by the dynamic spirit of the Teachings, to be confirmed.

If Public Meetings are held regularly and frequently in a community a certain number of people will almost surely come to regard the Baha'i meetings as a substitute for Church. Such people will inevitably come to know a considerable amount about the Faith, but they may never be confirmed in it if they are encouraged to make meeting-going a habit, and not a method of investigation.

Helpful Suggestions.

It has been found that frequent readings from the Writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and 'Abdu'l-Baha at Public Meetings carries the spirit of the Faith most effectively into the meeting. If the gathering is a small one, a contact might be asked to read the quotations. This gives the individual a sense of inclusion in the activity of the meeting.

The believers should make every possible effort to meet all of the visitors at a Public Meeting personally, offer to assist them in their investigation, distribute free literature, invite them to future meetings and social occasions, and generally make friends with them if possible.

The break for tea, and the reconvening of the meeting afterwards for questions and discussion is often a successful method of introducing a less formal atmosphere into the meeting.

If a Community has had a large number of Public Meetings, any change in teaching routine of that Community should be gradual; for Public Meetings build up a considerable prestige in the eyes of the public, and any sudden change in the routine by, say, suddenly discontinuing Public Meetings, might well lower the standard of the Cause

in their eyes.

Public Meetings in Small Communities.

Except in towns where the Cause has never been publicized before, at this particular stage in the development of most of the British Baha'i Communities, the Public Meeting should be planned more to meet the growing needs of the contacts already attracted to the Faith and with the facilities of the local Community well in mind, than in an effort to attract an entirely new group of enquirers. Our pressing concern at the moment is to confirm and deepen the belief of that small number of believers who will in later teaching enterprises carry the Faith to the masses of the people.

Public Meetings should be made, as much as possible, to serve the ends of confirmation. For this purpose, meetings of differing types are very useful. Brains Trusts allow the contacts to ask questions about the Teachings and the Baha'i way of life; Devotional Meetings disclose the apiritual aspect of the Faith, and so forth. (For full information regarding Receptions and the various types of Public Meeting, see pages 17 to 21 of the Teaching Manual.)

Note.

The Faith will inevitably be judged by the enquirers, in the first instance, by the quality and dignity of the meetings which they attend. It is, therefore, essential that our meetings reflect the beauty which lies inherent in the Faith. The entire world seems sunk in pessimism, gloom, poverty of material goods and spiritual attitude, and ugliness instead of radiance and beauty. Baha'i meetings, if they are to fulfil their purpose, must manifest just the opposite characteristics. It is essential that the planning of a Public Meeting be consulted upon to the final detail and that every member of that Community realize that he shares, along with the speaker, the chairman and the ushers, the responsibility of making the meeting vibrant with the true spirit of Baha'i love and fellowship. Let the room be attractive, clean and comfortable. Let it be brightened by flowers and the display of Baha'i photographs. Let the believers welcome the enquirers as if

each one were the guest of honour at the meeting. Let the believers put all cares and worries aside when in the company of a seeker. Let him devote himself entirely to the priceless privilege of teaching the Faith. Let him show no sign of weakness of spirit or faintness of heart or faith when with an attracted soul, for his own momentary faltering may so easily become a veil across the eyes of his contact. If the atmosphere of the meeting is beautiful and the attitude of the friends most loving, the hearts will be attracted and the minds opened.

NATIONAL TEACHING COMMITTEE.