

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

August 18, 2020

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3 To the American Bahá'í community  
4 for the Feast of 'Asmá'

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6 Dearly loved Friends,

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8 In its landmark July 22 message addressed expressly to this Bahá'í community, the  
9 Universal House of Justice characterized this time as **"a moment of historic portent"**  
10 **which "holds significance not only for the destiny of America anticipated in the Sacred**  
11 **Writings, but also for the mission entrusted to your community by the hand of 'Abdu'l-**  
12 **Bahá."** A significant element of that mission is to play a decisive role—in the fullness of  
13 time and as a result of determined and sustained effort—in eradicating the stain of racial  
14 prejudice from the fabric of our nation.  
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16 Such an endeavor requires from us capacities that are repeatedly emphasized in the  
17 concepts and approaches of the current series of Five Year Plans—not least of them the  
18 **capacities to read our reality, assess that reality in light of the teachings of the Faith,**  
19 **take meaningful action according to those teachings, engage in honest reflection, and**  
20 **refine our efforts as new insights emerge.** Achieving them requires the combined efforts  
21 of individuals, their respective communities, and the institutions of the Faith. Over time,  
22 we have found that Local Spiritual Assemblies in particular play a key role, and we have  
23 been pleased to hear from a number of them about their activities and learning.  
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25 We recently received, for example, a wonderful report written on behalf of the Spiritual  
26 Assembly of Washington, DC, which chronicles several years of conscious effort and  
27 learning centered on the concept of race unity. **Several years ago, the DC Assembly**  
28 **decided to make freedom from racial prejudice the watchword in all of its meetings,**  
29 **agreeing that every matter would include consideration of the question: "What are the**  
30 **racial, cultural, class, and gender implications of this decision?"** The Assembly also  
31 began regularly asking itself how its decisions promote the nobility of African Americans  
32 and draw on their experience. In the years since, the Assembly has applied these  
33 questions to virtually all facets of the life of the community.  
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35 **"These questions," the report states, "are placed at the top of the Assembly's agenda,**  
36 **and asking them has definitely influenced decisions in many different situations.**  
37 Equally important is the consultation that takes place when the questions are considered  
38 as part of the consultative process. Our understanding of issues deepens, as does our  
39 unity of thought. At times the consultation can become very intense, but the Assembly  
40 has not backed away from that intensity."  
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42 The report goes on to describe numerous lines of action resulting from this approach,  
43 many undertaken in close collaboration with their Auxiliary Board members and cluster  
44 agencies. One significant achievement has been an increase in the participation and  
45 enrollment of African Americans. The report states:  
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47 **In the last year, eight African Americans have enrolled in the Faith;** all were  
48 accompanied through the institute process by white, Latino, Persian, and African  
49 American Bahá'ís, and they all remain actively engaged in the core activities and  
50 community life. One of these new African American believers has recently been  
51 appointed as a member of the Area Teaching Committee. **The Assembly invited**  
52 **all eight to a dinner meeting to learn about their desires and to share passages**  
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54 **about the pupil of the eye. From this gathering, the Assembly gained a great**  
55 **deal of insight into what these friends felt was important when sharing the**  
56 **Faith with other African Americans, such as the teachings on racial unity and**  
57 **racial justice and the concept of the pupil of the eye. The point of inviting**  
58 **them to such a gathering was to emphasize the role of African Americans and**  
59 **to assure them that they and their viewpoints are valued in this community.**

60 The Assembly strives to always remember that 'every organized community  
61 enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and  
62 inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority  
63 belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.'

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65 The Assembly summed up its approach this way:

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67 **Efforts to integrate questions of race, class and culture into the life** of the DC  
68 **Bahá'í community have been significantly aided by two foundational**  
69 **principles guiding the framework for action of the Five Year Plan: 1)**  
70 **approaching this with intention as an aspect of a process of learning that 2)**  
71 **advances as we build capacity through systematic action and reflection.** The  
72 more we do, the more we learn. The more we learn, the more we grow in  
73 strength. **Thus, we understand this is a process in which we learn to build our**  
74 **capacity at all levels—the individual, the community and the institutions—to**  
75 **better address issues of race proactively and as they naturally come up when a**  
76 **diverse group of people come together in an intimate space.** This  
77 understanding allows us to appreciate that this is a process that unfolds over  
78 time, which is not at odds with urgency, and to remember that 'systematization  
79 is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.' . . . [We are]  
80 sharing this information in the spirit of learning, not because we feel like we've  
81 arrived. We are grateful to Bahá'u'lláh for guiding us in our efforts, realizing that  
82 we still have much to learn.

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84 Dear friends, the DC Assembly's entire 12-page report is accessible on the landing page of  
85 the national Race Unity Action Resources site (at [https://sites.google.com/bahai.us/race-](https://sites.google.com/bahai.us/race-unity-action/ideas-for-action/community-building)  
86 [unity-action/ideas-for-action/community-building](https://sites.google.com/bahai.us/race-unity-action/ideas-for-action/community-building)) and it merits your attention. We hope  
87 that the friends everywhere, especially members of local Assemblies, will read it carefully  
88 and will gain insights that will serve to stimulate and encourage their own efforts.

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90 Our constant and ardent prayers accompany you in all your efforts in this great arena of  
91 endeavor.

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93 With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
94 NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF  
95 THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES



96  
97 Kenneth E. Bowers  
98 Secretary