

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

June 24, 2021

To the Regional Bahá'í Councils
and Regional Training Institutes

Dearly loved Friends,

The progress made in the course of the recently concluded Five Year Plan was a source of elation to us, particularly the progress seen in its last year, as it took place in the face of the unprecedented challenges imposed by the pandemic. From every standpoint, it was possible to view that Plan—together with the Plans comprising the 20 years that preceded it—as a time when approaches and structures essential to creating a steadily accelerating process of growth in this country were firmly established. Together with our fellow believers across the world, American Bahá'ís were thrilled by the assessment of the Faith's progress the Universal House of Justice presented in its Ridván message, sharing in the spirit of victory it so brilliantly expressed. Our part in the developments it spoke of was achieved in no small measure through your faithful and wholehearted exertions, for which we wish to express our profound gratitude.

You are now busily engaged in responding to the imperatives of the new One Year Plan, which is intended to advance and consolidate these victories. Together with the Continental Board of Counselors, we have observed with warm appreciation the efforts you are already making to ensure that this unique and historic year, fortified and inspired by our commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the passing of our beloved Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will set the stage for great progress in the Nine Year Plan that will follow. Mindful of this, we published our recent "Call to Action," calling the friends' attention to the requirements of these precious 12 months. After a series of consultations with the Counselors, we wish to offer the following to assist your efforts, in hopes that, together with the Counselors and your respective Auxiliary Board members, you will return to these themes in a spirit of learning throughout the balance of the year.

One of the most gratifying outcomes of the last Plan was the remarkable acceleration in the advancement of clusters. To highlight an important example, the number of clusters that had advanced beyond the third milestone of growth at the outset of the Plan stood at just eight, after two decades of effort. Over the following three years, the total was increased by a further 11 clusters, for a total of 19. In the fourth year of the Plan, 15 more were added, for a total of 34; and in the Plan's final year still another 28 clusters joined these ranks, for a current total of 62 (with two more added since then). One can see in these figures the signs of steadily strengthening regional institutes—including a process whereby learning can be effectively generated and disseminated throughout the regions. There is every reason for confidence that both the coming year—and the Plan beyond it—will see a further acceleration in this regard.

To consider this matter in concrete terms, it will be helpful to obtain as reliable a fix as possible on the number of clusters that can be advanced from the first to the second milestone, and from the second to the third. (For those that have advanced beyond the third milestone, we can consider how they can be significantly strengthened.) Given the considerable momentum already established, it seems reasonable to think broadly in terms of doubling the number of core activities. To this end, you might consult on such

questions as the following:

- How many clusters where programs of growth have been established can now advance beyond the second milestone?
- In clusters that have about 40–50 core activities in place, how many can advance to about 100, thereby advancing beyond the third milestone?
- In clusters that have advanced beyond the third milestone, how many with about 100 or so core activities in place could double this to about 200? How many clusters with 200–300 can now advance to about 500? And how can the few clusters with 500 or more core activities now advance to 1,000?

Needless to say, the setting of such goals raises a number of essential questions, such as:

- What are the capacities needed to double the number of core activities in our clusters?
- What lines of action need to be strengthened?
- How can the reservoir clusters serve as a locus for learning and capacity building?
- How can the institutes in particular avail themselves of the precious summer months in pursuit of these goals?

Another helpful approach would be to think in terms of the number of participants in core activities. Presently about a third of the nearly 80,000 participants nationwide are not members of the Bahá'í Faith. We are now well positioned to greatly increase the number of these souls and to create an environment in which more and more of them, in accordance with their receptivity and personal inclinations, will be attracted to and deeply affected by the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Friends from the larger community are welcome to participate in all core activities, and devotional gatherings in particular may well present the most fruitful avenue of effort. In the past year, the number of regular devotional gatherings in the country has increased considerably, largely as the result of their establishment in the homes of Bahá'í families. Building on this foundation, we can now consider how we might systematically encourage believers to invite their friends and neighbors to join them and to engage with them in conversations elevated by an atmosphere of prayer and reference to the Word of God. For many, this can naturally lead to entry into the institute process and engagement in various forms of service. In this way, we can create a direct connection between a pattern of collective worship and the educational system embodied in institute courses that incorporate both study and service.

Among the points touched on in our Call to Action to the community was the expectation of the Faith's senior institutions to soon welcome larger numbers of new believers into the embrace of the Cause. We hope that you will, in consultation with the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members, create a means of learning about this all-important thrust of the teaching work in a manner fully integrated in the framework of the Plan. Neighborhoods where intensive activity is taking place would be ideal environments in which to learn how increasing numbers of people can be both gently and wisely encouraged to formally register themselves as Bahá'ís, as a natural result of their attraction to the teachings, their engagement in the work of community building,

and their growing relationship with the Blessed Beauty. But your efforts to encourage the friends in this regard should not be confined to these neighborhoods; rather, they should be widely promoted throughout the community, with steps taken to systematically build the friends' capacity to do so. For example, fireside campaigns throughout clusters could well form an ongoing feature of their cycles' expansion phases.

In guidance received from the Universal House of Justice on August 9, 2012, we were reminded of the importance of teaching African-American and Indigenous peoples and called upon to reach out to members of populations newly arrived in our country:

The House of Justice has previously indicated, in letters written to you on its behalf, the importance of giving due attention to historically significant populations in the United States. This imperative remains. Today, the remarkable phenomenon of immigration that has accelerated in recent decades must also claim a major share of your attention.

Interwoven with this is the necessity for believers of African-American and Indigenous backgrounds, together with those from immigrant populations, to take their rightful place in the vanguard of our efforts to befriend and lovingly welcome into the fabric of our community life peoples from these backgrounds. As we noted in our Call to Action, success in this regard will be dependent on the degree to which institutions of the Faith at all levels manifest an attitude of encouragement. We expect you will make special, sustained efforts to reach out to these friends, to incorporate their ideas and views into your planning, to entrust them with roles of responsibility, and to support their efforts. You will appreciate that Local Spiritual Assemblies are your indispensable allies in this respect. We hope that you will, in your relationship with these institutions, consistently repeat and underscore all of the above themes, ensuring that the friends who serve as members are continuously reminded of the need for active engagement in the work of the Plan, and included in occasions you create for reflection and learning.

In your work with Assemblies and with the generality of the community, we ask that you continue your efforts to acquaint the friends with the abundant guidance from the Universal House of Justice linking the "principles and exhortations" found in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi with "the concepts and approaches for social transformation developed in the current series of Plans that can be utilized to promote race unity in the context of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society." We recall, for example, a significant statement in the House of Justice's message to the believers in North America on the 100th anniversary of the revelation of the first of the Master's Tablets of the Divine Plan. The passage reveals the Supreme Body's expectation that the community's pursuits will be characterized by focus and clarity of vision:

The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.

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Finally, it should be clear to anyone who has carefully read the recent guidance of the House of Justice that as the disintegrative forces at work in the world continue to erode the foundations of society, humanity is entering a period certain to be characterized by fierce challenges. Yet it will also be a time of immense opportunity for those who, with hearts filled with love for the Blessed Beauty, are steadily gaining the spiritual and practical resources to attract multitudes into the shelter of His unifying and world-embracing Faith.

A significant portion of this task falls to you, dearest friends, at this critical juncture, calling on you to set an example of consecrated service to the Divine Plan. No greater encouragement could be imagined than the example of your personal commitment to furthering the advancement of our beloved Faith, working shoulder to shoulder with your fellow believers. Be assured of our constant and ardent prayers for the great success of your endeavors in the promotion of this sacred and unifying Cause.

With deepest Bahá'í love,

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



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary