

Learning in action about racial prejudice in the Northwest Region and the increase of diverse and welcoming communities

November 2023

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Baha'u'llah has drawn the circle of unity, He has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples, and for the gathering of them all under the shelter of the tent of universal unity. This is the work of the Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the reality of unity in our midst, and as we work, so will strength be given unto us. –Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, pg. 54

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A brief narrative about the Regional Council's learning process concerning Anti-Black racism.

"Racism is a profound deviation from the standard of true morality...It cannot be rooted out by contest and conflict. It must be supplanted by the establishment of just relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions of society that will uplift all and will not designate anyone as "other". The change required is not merely social and economic, but above all moral and spiritual." –22 July 2020 Universal House of Justice

These pages document a systematic process of learning through action, reflection, consultation, and study that has been underway since the spring of 2020 by the Regional Baha'i Council of the Northwest. The Council's process is centered around the vision of Shoghi Effendi, that *"every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any Faith, race, class or nation within it"*.

The Council's process now involves a number of institutions, members of agencies, and other individuals, and is well into its third year. The effort is still in the early stages; some areas of work have moved quickly; others more slowly. There is much more to learn, of course, on many fronts. The Council is striving to understand and apply the teachings about race unity and freedom from prejudice in the context of the current series of Plans.

Early responses of the Council to the National Assembly's letters on race

In 2017, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote a series of letters focusing on racial unity and racial justice. An early response of the Council occurred in April of 2018 when it hosted a regional gathering for American Indian believers in Tacoma to basically listen to the friends. Among the outcomes was an increased awareness on the part of the Council that racial unity was still mostly aspirational in the Baha'i communities of the Northwest. Over the next couple of years, the Council conscientiously studied any guidance that it received on the issue. Major documents included the compilation provided by the NSA of letters written to individual believers in America dating back to 1996, and *Addressing Race, Class, and Culture: Reflections on Bahá'í Institutional Efforts in Washington, DC*. The resulting consultations of the Council were earnest and aimed at being responsive. Individual Council members shared compilations from time to time that augmented its study.

On occasion, the Council would take steps to support outreach efforts to bring the message of the Blessed Beauty to more diverse areas of the region; often this came in the form of supporting youth service opportunities in specific neighborhoods. At least on one occasion, the Council supported outreach efforts that came in response to a request from an historically significant population. Outcomes from these efforts were varied but the status of racial prejudice did not measurably change. Notably, at this time, the Council did not view its own institutional learning as being integral to the solution.

The priority around racial justice took a turn in the pivotal year of 2020 when spiritual and social forces converged. The awakening of the nation to anti-Black racism burst onto the scene charged by several highly visible deaths of African Americans at the hands of white citizens or law enforcement officers that peaked in May 2020 with the murder of George Floyd. The incidents were a confirmation for a distracted populace that unexamined racial prejudice was still very much a part of the American fabric. The grass roots response to these atrocities was immediate, extensive, and long lasting. Protests numbered well into the thousands across all 50 states and Washington, DC. Millions of residents took to the streets and to the internet to express a demand for the nation to embrace full racial justice. In some cities, protests lasted well over two years.

The impact of this national upheaval was certainly felt in Baha'i communities across the Northwest region. Both Portland and Seattle were among the cities that were centers for the national protests and, throughout the Northwest, Baha'is were joining in the conversation. The quality of conversation within Baha'i communities varied between instances of awareness, sacrifice and "high endeavor" to others that exposed misunderstandings, ignorance, and pain. Seemingly, we were not yet able, in the words of the Guardian, to "either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character." Council members shared news of incidents from various communities that involved insensitive language or attitudes, or behavior that led to alienating African American friends or other friends of color.

The Council saw the vital need of the region to develop a unified vision of racial justice and came to the realization that the need started with the Council itself. Council members had not challenged their own understandings in truly meaningful ways. It decided to engage in a process of systematic learning to better understand how to advance a united vision and purpose.

A deeper study of guidance serves as an entry to more intensive consultation.

The initial reaction of the Council members was to immerse themselves in the study of guidance. As a body, it undertook a deep study of recent guidance that included the updated compilation of Universal House of Justice letters on race unity from 1996-2020 that was released in May 2020, the 22 July 2020 letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the United States, and the 19 June 2020 letter to America from the National Spiritual Assembly. Council members committed an entire weekend of study, which was augmented by additional periods of study over months, collectively, independently, and some with their local communities.

The intensive study helped to bolster a richer, more honest, more heartfelt level of consultation than perhaps the Council had risked experiencing to that point. Differing views were put forth that, with practice and constancy, were heard, accepted, and explored. Over time, this deep consultation gave way to a higher degree of unity of thought and purpose as well as increasing the bonds of empathy, compassion, and fellowship amongst the members.

Initiating action to connect with friends of African descent.

The growing unity of thought and purpose that was borne out of the Council's repeated study and consultation at last culminated in a decision to initiate and sustain a process of learning in action. There was a collective sense that only by centering the issue of racial justice

systematically in all work in which the Council was engaged would allow for any true insight, healing, love, and growth. The Council acknowledged that the decision would demand an ongoing commitment over an extended period that would no doubt be marked by instances of crisis and victory. In making this decision, the Council was buoyed by the words of the Supreme Body in its 30 December 2021 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors that, over the next quarter century, the Baha'i world will raise fortified communities that will "have acquired capacities that can scarcely be glimpsed at present".

On December 28, 2020, the Council invited all known friends of African descent in the region to a virtual meeting. The Council went into the meeting with the intent to keep from imposing any expectations or insisting on any protocols. Its only goal was to allow the friends to talk about their experiences in the Baha'i community. During the meeting, the Council endeavored to speak only to ask clarifying questions. Any potential considerations for action would be discussed when the Council was in its own reflection space.

The meeting produced many insights. There was an initial note from one of the friends that they were being asked to share experiences that they had already shared many times, in various spaces, for many years. The Council heard a wide range of experiences from within the group, frustration, isolation, mistrust, a feeling that there were numerous members of various institutions that seemed to be either tone-deaf or insensitive to matters of race, attitudes and behaviors that reflected superiority and/or racial prejudice.

During a lengthy reflection after the online meeting the Council noted various themes that had emerged and on January 3, 2021, the Council responded to the friends in writing sharing what it had heard:

The Council listened carefully to your many invaluable and inspired comments in this first of what is envisioned as an on-going conversation with you. We were deeply moved by the depth of the frank and loving sharing. Shortly afterwards the Council reflected on some of the themes we heard. Many friends shared how Bahá'ís of African descent have suffered deep pain and isolation as they have interacted with the Bahá'í communities in which they try to serve, being exposed to and confronted with dismissive or paternalistic attitudes, expressing on-going frustration at not being heard and supported by the institutions, and dealing again and again with the feeling that their participation is not valued in the community. We also heard the description of how many young Black Bahá'ís have experienced racial prejudice in the community that prevents them from being able to be actively engaged in the work of the Cause – whether through cultural demands for assimilation, outright prejudice, or because their talents and capacities are not embraced. Related to this was also the observation that young people should be integral in the decision-making process. Many of your comments highlighted the need to apply the concepts and principles learned in the current series of plans to promote race unity and social transformation, including a need for the Bahá'í institutions to infuse a focus on racial justice and social transformation into the fundamental activities of the community and the framework of the plans. We also heard the hope that the institutions of the Faith would intentionally ask themselves what diverse perspectives are missing in the Bahá'í community experience and seek them out and that there is a need for greater institutional support for the individual efforts already underway. We also heard a clear expression of the

hope that the Regional Council will commit to the establishment of an Anti-Racism action plan and extend it into the work of Local Spiritual Assemblies and cluster agencies. The Council found it deeply moving to hear that despite so many difficulties, our Black brothers and sisters continue to feel a responsibility to serve the Cause and continue the work towards racial unity because of their love for Bahá'u'lláh.

An overarching theme was the real need of African American and other people of color to be heard and fully welcomed within their communities as well as in conversations with the institutions. Other important themes included a stated desire for the Council to accompany Local Spiritual Assemblies and cluster agencies in a plan to eliminate racism at the grassroots; a desire to have more diversity in service roles and that all who serve in those roles demonstrate a commitment to the elimination of systemic racism; a need for institutions to apply the concepts and principles put forth in the current series of plans to promote race unity and social transformation, and to support individual efforts that are already underway; the need to have young people of color fully involved as an integral part of the decision-making process.

Establishing an ongoing process of learning

In the days immediately following the virtual meeting, The Council shaped an initial plan that consisted of five major lines of action. These included initiating Anti-Black Racism education to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies along with others serving institutionally in the region to raise awareness and to consider what actions each could take in the context of the Plan; continuing the conversation with friends from African descent; opening conversations with other diverse population groups in the region; creating spaces for Persian friends to become educated on the reality of systemic racism in America; and paying attention to increasing the numbers of African Americans and other friends of color to be appointed to service roles in the region.

The Council's first steps consisted initially of all nine members committing to taking the Winter 2021 term of the Wilmette Institute's *Anti-Black Racism in the U.S. and Building a Unified Society* course as a vital step in its own process of learning. The Council invited all members from the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, and Beaverton, which make up a few of the most populated and diverse communities in the region, to accompany them with the offer to subsidize the cost of the course. This proved to be a workable model and, to date, over 8 terms, the Council has subsidized over 260 members from 40 Local Spiritual Assemblies as well as a number of others serving in cluster agencies to attend. Included in the following pages are some of the reactions that some have expressed in taking the course and any changes in behaviors or activities that have developed afterwards. (*See Appendix A for more details on the communities who had members attending the course*).

Other lines of action picked up momentum as well. One that had begun prior to the virtual meeting was a commitment to address the dearth of diversity among those appointed to serve in various regional and sub-regional roles. The lack of diversity had first been noted in a 2018 message from the National Spiritual Assembly after the Council had submitted a list of names to consider for approval to serve in regional roles. By mid-2020, the Council had put together the database of diverse populations as well as advancing a nomination process in the region that had begun to reverse the disparity. By 2021, the percentage of people of color serving in various roles had experienced a fivefold increase.

Various regional spaces for learning and communication were opened so that groups of assemblies or members of historic populations could gather to discuss experiences and/or ideas. A few of these spaces aided the formation of gatherings to promote aspects of community building such as the Souls of Black Folks Conference that took place in Olympia, Washington, in the summer of 2020.

Over the past few years, the persistence to apply learnings in action has decidedly strengthened the quality of relationships and level of functioning within the Council chambers. Initially, Council members chose to risk the level of unity they had gained to seek a deeper understanding of how racism was impacting the friends and communities of the Northwest. The desire to do this required a willingness to reflect upon and challenge one's own limited understanding as well as trusting the arc of changes that were being applied within the process. Over time, subtle changes were noticed in the expressions of joy at being together and the freedom that all members felt to share their views. The changes were reflected in the Council's ability to tackle additional difficult topics. Honest consultation and a growing trust in a learning process that allowed for regular action tempered by adjustments became hallmarks of Council functioning.

This does not imply that great progress has been made in the process of eliminating racism. The process is young, mistakes occur, vigilance is required, and the emergence of new capacities is ever needed. The Council has seen glimpses of progress, however, and those glimpses serve to confirm the desire to keep moving forward.

Emergence of partnerships

It is important to note that the Regional Council has been accompanied by resources from both within and outside the region. Among them, the faculty of the Wilmette Institute proved to be exceptional partners. They worked continually to help the Council with its goals, to refine the content and tools of the course to make it more suited to members of collective institutions and took advantage of its inherent structure that encourages participants to form local working groups during the term of the course. The course works quite well for members of Local Spiritual Assemblies to meet, reflect, and consult on how to apply the lessons of the course locally from an institutional perspective. The Wilmette registrar works closely with the Regional Office staff to make registration and group assignments cooperative, traceable, and transparent. Having the *Anti-Black Racism...* course in place as a foundational element and being able to partner with such an advanced and proactive team was crucial to advancing the process in the region.

Creation and refinement of regional structures and spaces to support the learning process.

At various junctures throughout the learning process, when the need dictates, structures or spaces have been created to advance the process of learning. Largely, these structures emerged in response to an immediate need that arose while taking a next step in advancing the work.

Some structures were put into place at the regional level with help from individuals, agencies, and/or the staff within the region. Others were provided and/or enhanced by outside agencies, such as the faculty and staff at the Wilmette Institute. Here are a few that came about.

Creating a database of known friends from African, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, and/or Pacific Islander descent residing in the region

One of the first actions the Council took was to create a database of names of all the friends in the region from African, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, and Pacific Islander descent. This was the first tool developed and proved to be an important one as there was no repository extant on any level that captured this data. Many friends serving in various roles in the region and at the sub-regional level contributed to the creation and regular updating of this repository. An initial version was in place and used when the Council invited all members of African descent to attend the initial Zoom call on December 28, 2020. It was subsequently used to create listservs for these populations. Ultimately, the Council's regional office partnered with the national statistical office to create hashtags to have this data reflected in SRP. Still, even with this focus, it is ultimately a manual process to keep the database updated and there are many who are not yet reflected there.

Establishing a working team

After the initial call with the friends from African descent, the Council established a working team made up of four Council members that met weekly to stay at the forefront of the work and follow learning. The team acted as the arm of the Council to move lines of action forward and liaised with the friends to ensure that they had access and support in the efforts they were carrying out.

Enhancing regional communication opportunities for historically significant populations

It became clear early on that the friends from historically significant populations needed additional ways to communicate with each other across community and cluster boundaries. The Council secretariat recruited the appropriate resources to create and moderate listservs to help streamline email messages. One was created out of a request from friends of African descent and another for the Indigenous friends.

Creating various regional spaces for reflection and planning

The Council experimented with providing additional spaces for joint reflections where groups of Assemblies, or others, could come together to share their experiences and activities. Three different spaces have proven to be quite helpful. One such space is a reflection that is held at the end of each term of the Anti-Black Racism course for all Spiritual Assemblies who just completed the term. This space allows for Assemblies to share their reflections and current plans for furthering learning and action at the local level.

A similar space is held on an annual basis. It welcomes members of all Spiritual Assemblies who have attended the course to a larger, more varied, and richer group reflection experience.

A third reflection space that has recently opened among those individuals who serve as Teaching Assistants (TAs) to the Anti-Black Racism course. These friends, whose number has grown to 14, represent a growing body of experience around the topic of racial unity and justice. They have met for group reflection and the Council is

considering making this an annual gathering as well. TAs provide insights into how the course has been received and applied at various points and places in the region. One of the TAs was invited to join the faculty at the Wilmette Institute. *(See Appendix B for a list of Teaching Assistants/Faculty that the WABR course has raised in the Northwest)*

Spaces for youth

The Council is aware that racism is a major concern to youth. However, they have not responded in significant numbers to the educational opportunities discussed in these pages. Some of the African American youth in the region have responded well to the Igniting Black Baha'i Youth (IBBY) conference. A couple of friends have shared feelings of connection, purpose, and inspiration that they took out of the experience. Focus neighborhoods are another area where youth actively cultivate diverse relationships forged through service. The Council is monitoring these activities and dedicated to increasing spaces where youth can learn together.

Working with the Wilmette Institute to pilot a course for Persian and Persian Americans using proven structures.

In early 2022, the Council established a working team composed of three members to assist in the process of establishing a course on systemic American racism for the education of Persians and Persian Americans, who have not had an opportunity to study the realities of this disease in any formal way. As the working team concept had worked well in supporting and managing the *Anti-Black Racism in the U.S. and Building a Unified Society* course for the Council, a similar approach was taken.

Within months, the Council decided to join with members of the Wilmette Institute faculty in the development of a course which came to be titled *Race Unity: The Role of Persian Americans*. Tools that were developed to assist tracking registrations for the main course were able to be utilized here. *(See Appendix E for timeline of a few structural milestones)*

Accompanying members of local institutions in the Wilmette Institute's Anti-Black Racism (WABR) course

“An essential element of the process will be honest and truthful discourse about current conditions and their causes... in particular, the deeply entrenched notions of anti-Blackness that pervade our society. We must build the capacity to truly hear and acknowledge the voices of those who have directly suffered from the effects of racism. . . This should not end with words, but lead to meaningful, constructive action.” --A Message from the Bahá'ís of the United States, “A Path to Racial Justice,” June 19, 2020

In February 2021, all nine members of the Regional Council participated in the Wilmette Institute's *Anti-Black Racism in the U.S. and Building a Unified Society* course. The Council was accompanied by 26 members from the four Local Spiritual Assemblies of Seattle, Portland, Tacoma, and Beaverton. In the eight terms total since the beginning of the region's involvement, 185 members from 29 Local Assemblies have participated in the course. *(See Appendix A for a list of Assemblies that have responded to the invite to participate in the course)*

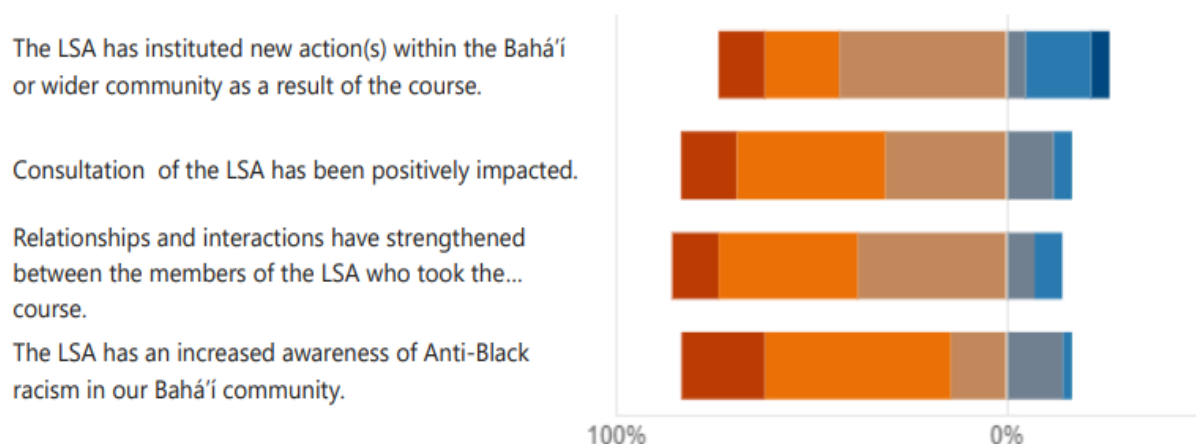
Applying lessons from the course to local learning

In June 2022, the Council conducted a survey of the 155 individuals from Local Spiritual Assemblies who had engaged in the WABR course by that time. The Council received 57 replies to the survey, which amounts to a 37% response rate. The survey consisted of 19 questions relating to the WABR course and the extent of the influence, if any, it had on both the members and the decisions of the institution after completion. A few highlights from this survey appear in this section.

Noting an LSA Survey on the WABR course from June 2022

Item #7 from the LSA survey reveal a positive change in LSA regarding consultation, action, relationship and awareness of racism. Item #7 reads: “After Assembly member(s) completed the Anti-Black Racism course the following changes can be described as below.”

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Slightly agree ■ Slightly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Some of the known activities in the region initiated or continued after participation in the course (through 5/2022)

The activities here represent a sampling of activity from the Assemblies that attended one of the first three terms of the course.

--**Portland** holds regular conversations as well as extending outreach to the wider community via interfaith discussions. The Portland Spiritual Assembly is extending invites and offers scholarships within the community to attend the WABR course.

--**Seattle** has a team working at extending service to people of African descent in the city. The Seattle Spiritual Assembly is extending invites within their community to attend the WABR.

--**Sammamish** is holding regular deepenings on race, involved in building relationships with the Interfaith group, and is scouting diverse neighborhoods for outreach efforts.

--**Spokane** is supporting the outreach efforts in the Chief Garry neighborhood as well as developing relationships with members of the Black Baptist Church, which has invited them to make use of their facilities.

--**Western Peninsula, SW WA** hosts a group that is beginning regular conversations on racism in the Bremerton area. They are also planning regular devotions focused on diversity.

A few responses from LSA members who completed the June 2022 survey.

The responses are from question #11 which reads: *Please share any individual or ad-hoc actions (new or updated) taking place in the community after studying the subject.* (12 out of 32 total responses are shared below)

1. [We] worked with our City Equity Board to celebrate Juneteenth event. worked very closely with them and they were very appreciative. A lot more work [ahead]
2. Our Assembly took an active role in supporting the City of Issaquah Washington's Equity Board, as they were planning for the Juneteenth celebration for the city.
3. Several members of the Eugene community studied the National Center for Race Amity's 'Be the Change' study guide with the LSA and have taken part in devotional walks following the Strides for Social Justice Informational Walks.
4. We were having short discussions on racism at Feasts but that stopped in the spring and may graduate to another format in the future. One local Baha'i was inspired by a video the LSA showed where Ruhi 1 was studied and the questions... were framed around race. She did that with her extended family. Vancouver Baha'is also had a booth at the first Juneteenth Celebration... We hope to join Portland's next year too.
5. There is an ongoing discussion on race with friends of the Faith, a Race Reflection gathering every cycle, engagement with organizations run by people of color.
6. Continued book studies open to everyone. Focus on anti-racism study. I'm personally trying to be more active in this work in my workplace.
7. [S]ince completion of the first course, I have joined the ABR course as a TA, facilitated a local study group, and facilitated the Assembly/community gatherings that the Assembly hosts every 2 weeks. My husband... and I have offered a learning module at my work re: antiblack racism and medicine at Randall Children's Hospital. Our daughter ..., will participate in the upcoming Green Acre training re-conceptualizing blackness.
8. Prior to taking this course I was hesitant to engage in meaningful conversations about race because I didn't feel like I had "enough" knowledge about the subject. The course empowered [me].
9. Members of the community search for places to serve in the community that are beyond their former comfort zones.
10. More effort to include African Americans in our local global conference held in June.
11. We started with weekly consultations during the course, followed by monthly consultations, and now have a member looking at the possibility of leading a training session for the community.
12. We now have an underlying awareness of the need to engage with all of the diverse cultures in our Baha'i and non-Baha'i community.

Gaining capacity to extend invitations to friends of African descent and other people of color from the wider community.

There have been approximately a dozen people from the wider community invited to attend the WABR course by participants from the Northwest. The Council and the Wilmette Institute are engaged in learning more about this capacity to invite people from the wider community. Below are a few comments from a few of these participants who are not members of the Baha'i Faith but were invited to take the course through a Baha'i friend or acquaintance.

- The [Wilmette] anti-racism course provided a forum for people of varying identities with structure and the space to begin or continue to have conversations around the very sensitive topic of race. I appreciate how the Bahai teaching provide a path for both black and white people to move toward unity with clarity, focus, and bravery. I felt supported and welcomed to share my thoughts and experiences. This course provided tangible steps forwarded in my anti-racism journey that I hadn't heard or considered previously.
- I've never been in a mixed group of people discussing the spiritual impacts of racism. (Comment in breakout during term #4)
- I enjoyed the course, the dialogue, and the education. Time and energy that was spent on making the experience interactive on a human level. I haven't fully delved into the resources and am not sure if I have access to it at this moment. I would love to dabble at my own pace, it seemed hearty enough.
- This course has been so helpful to refer back to in moments when I am seeking guidance in my DEI [Diversity, Education and Inclusion] work. It has given me a fuller, more complete understanding of what it means to exist in a black or brown body and where so much of what we go through today is anchored in our past. It also grounded me in hope and thinking about creative ways to bring about change. I wholeheartedly loved this experience and would take it again and again. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity.
- [A Regional Council member, who also served as a TA, shared a recent discussion she had with a white co-worker from the wider community who attended the course at her invitation.]
- The co-worker and his spouse, who is bi-racial, attended the course in October 2019. The co-worker commented on his continuing admiration for the course and how it has impacted the lives of both he and his wife. He shared how he has been able to engage as an upstander when the opportunity arises. He related a recent experience of waiting in line at McDonald's where a white man in line was directing racist slurs at another individual in the line. The coworker decided to intervene by telling the offender that his language and attitude were "not okay" and that it was not acceptable to be talking in that manner. Immediately, others in line thanked and/or encouraged him for speaking up. One asked where he learned to do this. He pulled out his phone and showed her the home page for the Wilmette Institute. He told her this was the place where he learned to take this type of action and he encouraged her and a few others who were listening to sign up for the course.

This feedback may be indicative that we are gaining capacity to share the Faith's perspective of the harmful spiritual impacts of living with racial injustice and how its elimination is necessary to the establishment of the oneness of humankind. It has helped to identify elements of a conversation characterized by the principles of frank and loving consultation and a continued desire to learn.

In addition to the experiences captured here, which focus primarily on the institutional capacities that are needed to assist our communities to overcome Anti-Black racism, the Council is supportive of other courses of study that help educate participants on race prejudice, such as the Advent of Divine Justice, and Copper to Gold study groups. The current Plan offers a growing number of possibilities that offer a variety of action within the context of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society.

Continuing the conversation with the friends of African descent

“A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them...”
–Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, page 33.

In April 2021, the Council invited six friends who had engaged in the initial online meeting to meet and consult on any actions the friends might want to take. The group arranged for a second Zoom meeting with friends of African descent to consult on next steps.

After the meeting, the planning group expanded; the group decided to host a summer BBQ/Fish fry that would provide an opportunity for African American friends in the region to come together. In July 2021, roughly 100 people attended including several friends from the wider community. The friends consulted on other potential local and regional gatherings and activities that might follow.

On May 14-15, 2022, as part of the series of worldwide conferences, the friends organized the Souls of Black Folks Conference in Olympia, Washington. Approximately 200 people participated in conversations drawn from the conference materials and came together through music, dance, and cultural enrichment. Many friends from the wider community were in attendance and one was moved to formally join the Faith of the Blessed Beauty.

The conference included people of varied ethnicities including African, Caribbean, Indigenous, Asian, White, Latino/Hispanic, Pacific Islands, Persian, as well as multi-ethnic, multi-racial. Religious affiliations among the attendees included Baha’i, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, other and no religious affiliation. Four participants were members of the Black Hebrew Israelites

A few insights from the Souls of Black Folks Conference (7/2022):

- Feedback indicated that a major key to the warm and uplifting experience was the organic way that cultural elements such as dance were woven into presentations and during breaks, music, collage, soul food, were included in a manner that was completely familiar to people of African descent in the United States. Many friends from the wider community who attended were completely at ease and enjoyed the gathering.
- In the words of an indigenous believer who attended and later wrote to the organizers: “[T]his conference was one of the best Bahai experiences of my life! ...Your love of Baha’u’llah and obedience to the guidance of the Universal House of justice was vital part of the success...this event was crowned with an enrollment of a long-time friend of the Faith [which] reveals the potency of the spiritual energy you were able to manifest.”
- In the same letter, it was written: “Your conference will enhance the two conferences, both in June, I am working on with others for people of color. I loved how you took the booklet from the RBC and adapted it to your conference needs. I loved the video Glimpses you created for your conference, and I hope that it is something I can share with family and friends.”

- A few challenges were noted. There were instances of hurt that occurred, moments that required more sensitivity and inclusion. Also, a few of the youth responded that they did not feel to truly be a part of the program. There was not sufficient time for young attendees to interact and build relationships.

Increasing the numbers of African Americans and other friends of color in roles of responsibility and encouraging all who serve to demonstrate a commitment to the elimination of systemic racism.

“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.” -- 2022, August 8 from the US National Spiritual Assembly to all Regional Bahá’í Councils and Regional Training Institutes

By 2020, through a combination of creating structures, such as diversity spreadsheets and increasing the conversation among members of regional agencies, there was a healthy increase in diversity within appointed roles in the region.

In 2021, the Council recommended the size of the RTI Board expand to seven members while increasing further the diversity in the agency. ATC appointments were another area that came into focus for the Council. This process was larger than expanding a recommendation list. It involved teaming with the Regional Growth Facilitators (RGFs) in the region. The Council Secretary meets regularly with the Regional Growth Facilitators (who accompany our 35 Area Teaching Committees). At the meeting, the friends together have developed a process that includes grouping teams consulting the diversity spreadsheet whenever recommendations for appointments are being. Consideration is now being given to a much broader spectrum of candidates when recommendations for service are offered. *(See Appendix D to see a recent history of regional and sub-regional appointees)*

During the virtual meeting with the friends of African descent in December 2020, the friends commented while diversity is, of course, important, there is also a need for those in roles to have a demonstrated commitment to racial justice. Of course, this perspective is integral to the process.

Helping to educate Persian and Persian American friends on American Anti-Black racism.

“Ultimately, the power to transform the world is effected by love, love originating from the relationship with the divine, love ablaze among members of a community, love extended without restriction to every human being. ... You are channels for this divine love; let it flow through you for all who cross your path. Infuse it into every neighborhood and social space in which you move to build capacity to canalize the society-building power of Baha'u'llah's Revelation. There can be no rest until the destined outcome is achieved.” --22 July 2020 Universal House of Justice”

Friends from Persians descent make up the largest minority demographic within the Bahá’í community of the Northwest; over 1700 such individuals reside here. In the first meeting that the Council held with friends of African descent in December 2020, it was noted that a relatively high number of the friends of Persian descent have not been educated on systemic American

Anti-Black racism. This has at times given way to misunderstandings that often result in unintentional but hurtful interactions with people of color. The Council took a decision to find or establish a course of study specifically suited to the Persian friends.

In the spring of 2021, the Council decided to foster the creation of a course that would be effective for friends from the Cradle of the Faith to assist them in understanding Race in America and to invite them to actively support racial justice and unity in their communities. This effort became joined with members of the Wilmette faculty who were working on such a possibility, and a course was designed to help educate Persians and Persian Americans on the systemic racism inherent in America. The course, which came to be titled *Race Unity: The Role of Persian Americans*, was piloted in the fall of 2021.

The course was well received and became a regular part of the Wilmette curriculum shortly thereafter. Seven friends from the Northwest arose to be Teaching Assistants for the course. (See *Appendix C for a list of communities and Teaching Assistants/Faculty that have participated*)

A few insights from the Pilot offering of “Race Unity: The Role of Persian Americans”

Faculty insights:

- Initial low level of awareness among Persian friends on the topic demonstrated the need for the course as they did not understand the relevance it had to their lives.
- The environment of the course was characterized by “*eshg va mohabat*” (love and kindness) where empathy for the suffering of others was witnessed.
- Friends from other regions are requesting this course. We hope that we can be guided by our beloved NSA to respond to the needs of various regions....
- Before the course is even over, there are small acts of kindness and more elaborate efforts that have attracted participation from the wider community.

Participant insights:

1. The most important thing that I learned was that they are not the “other”, we are one. I learned how to interact with them. They are our friends, and we work together and serve together. Can we take this course again?
2. [M]y Black neighbors are right next door, we have a good relationship, but I don't invite them to dinner, but we invite our Persian neighbors who live farther away. Now I realize that I need to change that.
3. I am a real estate agent. I became aware that I want to speak up when people are being prejudiced. When I was showing a place to a family, there were African American kids playing outside and the clients asked me "is this a safe neighborhood"? Normally, I would just let it pass, now I tell them that living in diverse neighborhoods is a real benefit.
4. It was really important for me to learn about slavery. I am a teacher, so I need to be aware, and I have to teach my own grandchildren. In my work, when I am telling stories, I will have more diverse stories because we have to teach the white people to be kind to black people.

Initiating conversations with other Diverse Populations

"No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Bahá'í community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races. A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity... is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart." - Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice

To date, most of the experiences around the elimination of racial prejudice has been focused on Anti-Black racism. Nevertheless, the American Indian population was among the historic population the Council reached out to, as mentioned above, in 2018. The Council initiated a meeting with a few friends to hear their experiences. The friends are engaged in much activity and there is so much to do. In 2021, the Council Secretary held conversations with a few friends who were initiating Indian teaching activities in a few population centers of the Northwest. In October of that year, a tutor among the population formed a group to facilitate study of the updated versions of Reflections on the Life of the Spirit and Walking a Path of Service.

In the Fall of 2020, two Baha'i Inspired Spiritual Social Economic Develop organizations, Ancient Cedars and Consultants for Indian Progress, held a spontaneous conference based on the series of worldwide conferences initiated by the House of Justice. The conference took the form of a retreat for the Board of Directors for the newly formed Tahoma Indian Center Nonprofit Organization. One woman declared her belief in Baha'u'llah.

The Paddles Up Family Strong retreat was held June 2022 at Wild Hearts Farm, an Indigenous-owned business. The conference was supported by Ancient Cedars and Consultants for Indian Progress.

In spring 2021, a group of Latino/Hispanic friends met together to discuss holding a Spanish-speaking conference. The friends decided on small, local conferences. One such local conference took place in Snohomish County where 18 people including 2 friends from the wider community took part. It was an intimate gathering. In the mode of a fireside, it focused on sharing Baha'u'llah's vision for humanity. Questions and answers around the vision were invited.

A group of friends of Pacific Island descent worked with the Ocean of Light-Tongan Committee of WA to host a conference for Pacific Islanders that was held in the summer of 2022. Approximately 70 people attended, 25-30 of whom were from the wider community.

Into the third year, the Regional Council as well as a growing number of Local Spiritual Assemblies continues to pursue institutional learning and action aimed at removing racial barriers in welcoming greater numbers of our diverse human family into the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The House of Justice has offered these words on what is required.

Appendix A: Local Assemblies that have taken part in the WABR course

As of November 2023, approximately 264 members from 40 different Local Spiritual

Resident Community	Grouping and Cluster No	# Registered	# @ post-reflection	Term
Everett	NW WA (WA13)	4	tbd	8
Seattle	NW WA (WA14)	9	9	1
Issaquah	NW WA (WA15)	7	2	4
Sammamish	NW WA (WA15)	6	4	2
Kent	NW WA (WA17)	7	0	3
Renton	NW WA (WA17)	5	3	3
Kirkland	NW WA (WA08)	7	6	2
Bellingham	NW WA (WA09)	6	0	4
Whatcom County	NW WA (WA09)	5	1	4
Jefferson County	SW WA (WA01)	4	tbd	8
Lakewood	SW WA (WA19)	6	n/a	6
Pierce County Peninsula	SW WA (WA19)	7	n/a	6
Pierce County SW	SW WA (WA19)	6	n/a	6
Tacoma	SW WA (WA19)	8	3	1, 7
Kitsap County North	SW WA (WA05)	6	tbd	8
Kitsap County South	SW WA (WA05)	6	tbd	8
Lacey	SW WA (WA06)	6	n/a	7
Thurston County	SW WA (WA06)	10	6	3
Aloha	NW OR (OR26)	10	5	3
Beaverton	NW OR (OR26)	8	3	1, 5
Hillsboro	NW OR (OR26)	8	0	4
Tigard	NW OR (OR26)	6	n/a	5, 6, 7
Tualatin	NW OR (OR26)	2	n/a	7
Washington County North	NW OR (OR26)	8	7	3
Washington County South	NW OR (OR26)	7	n/a	5, 7
Clackamas Co Northwest	NW OR (OR29)	9	n/a	7
Gladstone	NW OR (OR29)	6	tbd	8
Lake Oswego	NW OR (OR30)	9	n/a	6

Assemblies have taken the course over 8 consecutive terms.

Portland	NW OR (OR30)	9	7	1	
Camas	NW OR (OR04)	4	n/a	7	
Clark County	NW OR (OR04)	6	2	2	
Vancouver	NW OR (OR04)	8	4	2	
Eugene	S OR (OR14)	7	8	2, 5	
Springfield	S OR (OR14)	8	n/a	5	
Benton County	S OR (OR15)	2	tbd	8	
Corvallis	S OR (OR15)	4	tbd	8	
Ashland	S OR (OR09)	5	tbd	8	
Pendleton	EAST (ORWA21)	4	n/a	7	
Walla Walla	EAST (ORWA21)	6	n/a	6	
Kennewick	EAST (WA27)	6	n/a	6	
Spokane	EAST (WA28)	7	3	2	
Legend: Grouping	S OR	NW OR	SW WA	NW WA	East

Appendix B: Names of Teaching Assistants from the Northwest to the Wilmette Institute Anti-Black Racism Course through December 2022.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Nekicia Luckett (Faculty member) | Deborah Martineau |
| Derick Polk | Beverly Moore |
| Charlotte Partee-Dietch | Nilliet Homel |
| Naghmeah Moshtael | Damien-Adia Marassa |
| Ebonee Bell | Frederic Lo |
| Betty Chong-Gerbracht | Henri Cross |
| Roger Neyman | Todd Kutches |

Appendix C: Race Unity: The Role of Persian Americans

Participation among Persian and Persian Americans in the Wilmette Institute's course titled Race Unity for Persian Americans

The course had a pilot offering in October 2021. Northwest communities provided 69 of the 71 participants.

The course has had two official runs since including the fall of 2022 and the fall of 2023. The following is a list of participant communities.

Participant communities from the 2022 term with a total of 27 attendees:

Ashland OR – 1	Puyallup, WA – (2 in Persian language)
Beaverton, OR- 5 (4 in Persian language)	Renton, WA – (1 in Persian language)
Bellingham, WA- 1	Sammamish, WA- 1
Camas, WA- 1	Seattle, WA – (2 in Persian language)
Duvall, WA- 1	Tigard, OR – (1 in Persian language)
Eugene, OR - 2	University Place, WA – 2
Kirkland, WA – (2 in Persian language)	Vancouver, WA – 2 (1 in Persian language)
Maple Valley, WA - 1	Wilsonville, OR- 2

Participant communities from the 2023 term with a total of 23 attendees:

Beaverton, OR- 1	Kirkland, WA – 2 (1 in Persian language)
Bellevue, WA- (1 in Persian language)	Seattle, WA – 1
Camas, WA- 7	Springfield, OR – (1 in Persian language)
Dallas, OR – (1 in Persian language)	Vancouver, WA – (5 in Persian language)
Issaquah, WA – (3 in Persian language)	Wilsonville, OR- 1

Teaching Assistants from the Northwest region for the Wilmette Institute's course, *Race Unity for Persian Americans* (December 2022.)

Azita Moallem (Faculty member)	Nahid Eng
Haleh Rasai	Jila Misaghi
Taraneh Mohajeri	Shiva Sabet-Kazilas
Nasrin Abbasi	

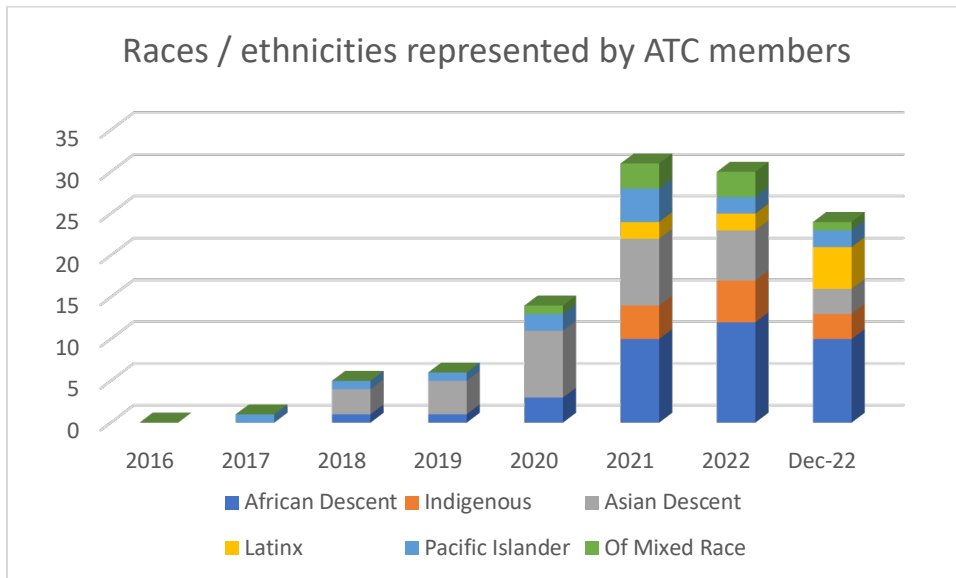
Appendix D: Tracking diversity in service roles

Below is a snapshot of diversity in service roles in the NW region either appointed or approved by the Council. These numbers were put together in October 2022 based on estimates of ~7,000 believers in the NW region including 1832 from historically diverse backgrounds.

Service Role	%	Diverse population breakdown
Regional Training Institute Board	72%	(5 of 7)
Regional Growth Facilitators	20%	(1 of 5)
Area Teaching Committees	21%	(24 of 112)
ATC Secretaries	15%	(5 of 33)
Cluster Coordinators (JY/CC/SC)	13%	(4 of 29)

Below is a chart showing a multi-year trend of appointments of people of Color serving on ATCs. While the overall number serving on ATCs declined in 2022, but the percentage of friends of color was maintained.

ATC members of Color serving in the Northwest Region since 2016
(Ridván-Dec 2022)



Appendix E: Timeline of structural milestones:

October 2020	Structures/spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council office has compiled a list of 1830 known Bahá'ís from historically important and immigrant populations
December 2020	Structures/spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council met with over 50 friends from African descent via Zoom on 12/28/20. Subsequent Counsell consultation resulted to engage in a process of learning.
January 2021	Structures/spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council established a working team to act as arm of Council on the racial justice work. <input type="checkbox"/> Working team met with faculty of Wilmette Institute to explore reserving 50 seats for the February 2021 term
February 2021	WABR course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Council members plus approximately 32 LSA members from four different Assemblies are enrolled in the spring 2021 term of the Wilmette Anti-Black Racism... course. <input type="checkbox"/> All LSAs have at least a quorum enrolled. A total of over 60 participants are from the NW region. <input type="checkbox"/> 3 of 12 Teaching Assistants in the spring 2021 term are from the NW region.
September 2021	Structures/tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council created listservs for friends of African descent and another for Indigenous Bahá'ís to facilitate better opportunities for contact.
October 2021	WABR course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Approximately 75 LSA members from 10 Assemblies have completed the course to date (Terms #1 & 2). The NW has maintained a participant ratio of 40% African American or other people of color. <input type="checkbox"/> All current members of the RTIB have taken the course. Of the current ABMs, three have taken the course. <input type="checkbox"/> 7 of 17 Teaching Assistants that served Cohort #2 were from the NW Region.
March 2021	Structures/spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council forms a working group to help facilitate the development of a course to educate Persian and Persian Americans on systemic American racism
April 2021	Role of Persian Americans course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council partners with Wilmette faculty to foster creation of the course for Persians and Persian Americans. Development is underway
June 2022	Structures/spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Council conducts a survey for LSA members who took part in one or more of the first 4 terms of the course

November 2021	Role of Persian Americans course	<input type="checkbox"/> Race Unity: The Role of Persian Americans the pilot by is underway. 69 of 71 participants are from communities in the NW. <input type="checkbox"/> The course is presented in both Farsi and English languages and is intended for families.
November 2022	WABR course	<input type="checkbox"/> Approximately 185 LSA members from 29 Assemblies have completed the WABR course to date. Approximately 84 friends of African descent or other persons of color have attended at least one of the terms. <input type="checkbox"/> The NW has produced 13 Teaching Assistants, eight of whom are African American. Nine of the TAs have served for more than one term.

Ultimately, the power to transform the world is effected by love, love originating from the relationship with the divine, love ablaze among members of a community, love extended without restriction to every human being. This divine love, ignited by the Word of God, is disseminated by enkindled souls through intimate conversations that create new susceptibilities in human hearts, open minds to moral persuasion, and loosen the hold of biased norms and social systems so that they can gradually take on a new form in keeping with the requirements of humanity's age of maturity. You are channels for this divine love; let it flow through you for all who cross your path. Infuse it into every neighborhood and social space in which you move to build capacity to canalize the society-building power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. There can be no rest until the destined outcome is achieved. –22 July 2020 Universal House of Justice”