

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

September 7, 2015

To the American Bahá'í community
for the Feast of 'Izzat

Dearly loved Friends,

Recent news of significant developments in the support young people are lending to the community-building work in progress in clusters across the country has brought joy to our hearts. We are delighted to share this news with you, as it bodes well for tasks still to be accomplished as we press on toward a victorious conclusion of the Five Year Plan.

Since the 2013 youth conferences, the number of young people involved in the life of the community in North America has increased from about 8,000 to nearly 12,000, a significant percentage of them not Bahá'ís. The level of these youths' engagement ranges along a continuum—from those who have entered into a meaningful and sustained conversation with their peers on such themes as service and the betterment of the world, to those who are participating in institute training with the aim of developing skills for specific services, to those who have initiated their own activities and those who have now achieved a sufficient level of experience to accompany others on the path of service.

While the growth in numbers has been impressive, so too have the lessons learned along the way. One analysis received noted the following characteristics of efforts successfully sustained:

A common thread is the importance of true friendship, of genuine concern, of mutual support and assistance for those invited into the institute. This friendship needs to extend beyond the tutor and the group of youth studying together to include other members of the community. Increasing integration into the life of the community—[through] invitations to devotional gatherings, Holy Day commemorations, firesides, various community gatherings and social activities—is of great importance. Those youth from the wider community who participate in the life of the Bahá'í community and establish connections to many of the friends, of all ages, have been much more likely to commit to and complete the initial courses of the institute. They are also more likely to recognize Bahá'u'lláh and to enroll formally.

The analysis demonstrates the power that can be accrued from an entire community's involvement in encouraging the youth. It also shows that much is being learned about the importance of teaching within the context of community building. An excerpt from a report filed about the San Diego cluster—where at least 20 youths have enrolled in the Faith—provides further evidence of this learning:

In San Diego, capacity to teach directly increased considerably in the previous Plan and has carried over to this Plan, especially in terms of the work with youth. This is perhaps most evident in the neighborhood of City Heights. A spirit of teaching has always characterized the efforts in City Heights and at the outset of this Plan, as increased attention was given to younger generations, many youth were taught directly and invited formally to embrace the Cause. As a result, learning was generated about the use of elements such as firesides to present the Faith directly or to deepen conversations, study or deepening classes for groups of youth, and home visits with individual youth to study deepening themes—all of these complementing study of the institute courses. In addition, efforts in City Heights always involved drawing new believers into community

life, including participation in neighborhood Feasts, which were an ongoing and vibrant element of the pattern of life in the neighborhood from the previous Plan. More recently, the learning from City Heights has extended to the adjacent neighborhood of Encanto[,] as efforts were initiated there around 2013. Among the lessons that the friends in City Heights and Encanto have learned is that helping young people to draw closer to Bahá'u'lláh and [fostering] their inner life through prayer and adherence to spiritual laws helps them become more committed and consecrated in their service, sustaining them through the inevitable crises and victories they will encounter along the way.

Especially encouraging in this report is its portrayal of how the various elements of community life are coming together in a harmonious and mutually reinforcing pattern—giving rise to a vibrant source of attraction and upliftment and creating abundant opportunities for teaching and service. We are heartened to see that more and more clusters are acquiring the same insights and skills, laying a strong foundation for the launching of a new Plan at Ridván 2016.

Dear friends, though the road ahead remains long and challenging, these reports, which reflect the empowering learning and growth being gained in so many corners of our community, help steel our resolve to overcome every obstacle and fulfill every goal. As we arise to do so, let us never forget the assurances given by the beloved Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of the ready assistance that will come to the aid all who, with sincerity and unity of purpose, strive to render service to this sacred Cause:

If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid.

Be assured of our deepest affection and prayers for great success in your every effort to further our glorious mission to build unified communities vibrant with love and acceptance, and, in so doing, to reconstruct the world.

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



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary