

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

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Transmitted by email: usnsa@usbnc.org

The National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dearly loved Friends,

In November, the Universal House of Justice had the opportunity to consult with the International Teaching Centre and the Counsellors serving North America. From these consultations, as well as other recent occasions when the progress of growth in your nation has been reviewed, the House of Justice noted with pleasure the concentration of energies directed by your institution to the progress of the Five Year Plan. You have worked diligently and effectively, in close collaboration with the Counsellors, to consolidate the changes brought about by the reorganization of your regions in 2012. Attention has been given to guiding Regional Bahá'í Councils, establishing programs of growth in every goal cluster, and supporting the work of learning sites and the associated institute coordinators in nearly doubling the size and reach of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Steps have been taken to enhance involvement in the life of society at the level of thought and action. Beginning with the successful youth conferences held last year, your community, like many others, has demonstrated an ability to reach out to young people, Bahá'ís and others, raising their vision and stimulating their desire to contribute to the betterment of society, particularly by attending to the needs of those younger than themselves. And most recently, there has been renewed focus on engaging simultaneously in multiple lines of action and ensuring coherence as you do so. Work in each of these areas will, no doubt, be wisely and systematically extended as the measures you have put into place to build capacity for learning from the cluster to the national level gradually bear fruit. This must include reinvigorating aspects of the Plan that may have waned to some extent, such as the dynamism of the regional institutes, the engagement of the generality of the friends in a cluster in the pattern of community building, and the efforts of Area Teaching Committees to maintain the rhythm of three-month cycles of activity. In this regard, a few comments are offered for your consideration.

A steady flow of individuals through the sequence of courses is required if the training institute is to prepare the human resources necessary to respond to the demands of the process of growth at ever-higher levels of complexity. The first stage in the development of the institute process in your country drew largely upon the participation of veteran believers. Another considerable advance came when, following the regional conferences in 2008 at the midpoint of the last Plan, there was a marked upsurge in the involvement of the believers and their friends in the institute process. And whilst it is clear that the programs of the institute will continue to be offered to anyone, what is equally clear is that your community is now poised for a major turning point as you labor to realize the potential for the movement of thousands of young people through the sequence of courses. When buttressed by the wholehearted support of the

community, such a movement would not only lend impetus to the advancement of clusters throughout the United States, but this focus on working with so significant a number of youth will also naturally shape the next phase of the development of training institutes in your country. An effective approach to attracting young people has already been demonstrated, first at the conferences and subsequently in local gatherings. Attention can now be directed to learning how to translate their initial interest into systematic and well-integrated involvement in community-building endeavors in a cluster. Among the questions to be addressed are how to deepen conversations and expand bonds of friendship within groups of youth, how to foster and sustain acts of service, how to teach those who demonstrate interest in the Faith, and how to combine the activities of the youth within the larger pattern of cluster activities. Central to this inquiry is to learn how to assist as many young people as possible to study the sequence of courses in order to raise their capacity and broaden the scope of their action. Efforts must be redoubled, then, to strengthen regional institutes—enhancing the functioning of their boards, their regional and subregional arrangements, their cluster coordinators, and their tutors. By learning how to raise up and accompany even a few dedicated and effective tutors in each cluster, institutes can provide for the capacity that is required for the movement of a sizable number of individuals through the sequence of courses each year. The national gathering for regional coordinators in November appears to have contributed significantly to unity of thought toward advancing these aims.

The capacity to reach young people and assist them in carrying out acts of service, especially for establishing junior youth groups and children's classes in neighborhoods that have become centers of intense activity, offers great promise for the progress of clusters at every juncture along their path of development. However, experience has demonstrated that the process of community building falters if there is a sense that the work of the Plan is confined to the young or to certain neighborhoods alone. The House of Justice has emphasized the importance of a two-pronged approach to expansion and consolidation, involving endeavors throughout the localities in a cluster as well as in one or more receptive neighborhoods. The full pattern of activity envisioned for a thriving community requires involvement of the generality of believers. The friends everywhere can be assisted to overcome dichotomies, to grasp the intent of the Plan's community-building activities, and to determine the place each will choose in contributing to the collective effort.

The participation of greater numbers of individuals in the activities of a cluster requires a strong Area Teaching Committee. Regional Councils should be assisted to learn systematically how these committees emerge organically, as a program of growth intensifies, and contribute to the advancement of a cluster, cycle after cycle. The mobilization of individuals to ensure steady progress of the program of growth is the principal focus of the Area Teaching Committee. It fosters the process of reflection and planning by organizing the reflection meeting, facilitating a sound reading of the cluster's reality, and arranging for the accurate gathering and careful analysis of its statistics—all of which expand vision, build unity of thought, and illuminate the path for the progress of the cluster. Just as the training institute works closely to guide and accompany the friends who initiate children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles, the Area Teaching Committee can encourage and support many individuals to carry out other acts of service, such as hosting devotional gatherings, undertaking home visits, and teaching the Faith. These are not merely activities to be multiplied but fundamental aspects of Bahá'í community life intended for all. Devotional gatherings, for example, steadily multiply to include all of the believers in a cluster as well as many of their associates. The teaching

work is broad in scope, encompassing personal efforts as well as collective projects, selected neighborhoods as well as sundry localities, chosen populations as well as chance acquaintances, firesides as well as core activities. In this manner, the participation of more and more believers in the community-building activities of the Plan has profound implications at the level of culture. Devotional gatherings, the embryo of the local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, kindle the stirrings of the spirit and ignite the flame of service. Visiting one another's homes weaves bonds of love and union. Teaching becomes a way of life.

This attention to the strengthening of training institutes and Area Teaching Committees will complement the efforts already under way to accelerate the expansion of the junior youth program. Indeed, a dynamic collaboration between the training institutes and the learning sites will disseminate practices that have proven to be effective so that the program can take root in clusters throughout the country.

In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, that matchless call for action to your stalwart community, Shoghi Effendi refers to the “enthusiastic eagerness” of the believers in North America “to arise and display, in the vast field traced for them by the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, their capacity to play their part in the work of universal redemption proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh” when confronted by a world “dimmed by the steadily dying-out light of religion, heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism; scorched with the fires of pitiless persecution, whether racial or religious; deluded by the false theories and doctrines that threaten to supplant the worship of God and the sanctification of His laws; enervated by a rampant and brutal materialism; disintegrating through the corrosive influence of moral and spiritual decadence; and enmeshed in the coils of economic anarchy and strife”. The House of Justice has every confidence in the ability of your institution to reawaken this enthusiastic eagerness for service throughout your community in order to raise expansion and consolidation to unprecedented levels. It is evident that once you are able to learn to replicate the pattern of intensive action within your most advanced clusters in the hundreds of other clusters where a program of growth has been initiated, it will be possible to engage tens, and eventually hundreds of thousands of individuals in a vibrant, meaningful, and distinctive pattern of Bahá’í community life, open to all. Be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold that the friends in the United States may realize this high aim in the years ahead.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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