

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

February 29, 2016

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

Dearly loved Friends,

As we gather to celebrate this Feast, we do so mindful that we are not only beginning the Bahá'í month of 'Alá': at sunrise tomorrow, we commence our annual period of fasting, observed for each of the nineteen days leading up to Naw-Rúz, our joyous New Year. We enter a unique interval of time, alive with mystic power, rich in potential spiritual rewards. It is for this reason that, together with daily prayer and daily study of the sacred writings, keeping the Fast is one of the essentials of our devotional life.

We naturally wonder: how does fasting—the act of abstaining from food and drink for the requisite number of hours each day—contribute to spiritual development? The beloved Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, has explained it thus:

The fasting period [is] . . . essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul.

Indeed, the Fast's position as the nineteenth and last month on our calendar enables us to reflect on the conduct of our lives from the vantage point of a nearly completed year, quietly rejoicing, perhaps, in new strengths and insights we have gained, while acknowledging flaws and weaknesses needing remedy.

Just as the Fast provides precious time we can use to bring ourselves to account as individuals, we can also use it to review our conduct as a community, and one of the best indicators of our spiritual growth and development is the health of our Bahá'í Fund. As a national community, our performance this fiscal year has shown signs of improvement. For much of the year, contributions have been closer to quarterly markers of desired progress than in past years, an encouraging development and a sign of growing health we can all justly take pride in.

At this writing, however, total contributions stand at \$26.1 million, giving us ample cause for concern. With just eight weeks remaining in the fiscal year, we find ourselves \$7.9 million short of our \$34 million annual Fund goal. This means contributions of a million dollars a week will be necessary to meet our goal! A shortfall could interrupt the flow of support to clusters where the community-building work of the Five Year Plan is in successful full swing; it could likewise hamper the operations of our 10 Regional Bahá'í Councils and their skillful facilitation of the work of expansion and consolidation; it could also dangerously impair our ability to satisfy important financial obligations. Let us once more turn to the words of the beloved Guardian, written in an earlier time but no less applicable today:

[T]he National Fund, which undoubtedly constitutes the bedrock upon which all the activities of the Cause ultimately rest, should receive the continued and whole-hearted support of all the believers. Both the Local Assemblies and the individual believers should realize that unless they contribute regularly and generously to that Fund the progress of the Faith . . . will not only be considerably retarded, but will inevitably come to a standstill.

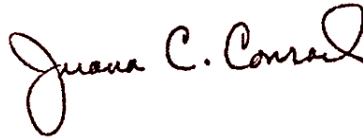
Friends, while the pattern of our giving has been, at points this year, markedly improved, this is no time to rest on our laurels or relax in our efforts. Important work to meet our commitments to the Plan now in progress remains before us; new and formidable challenges in the Plan to be launched at Ridván await us.

Let us think again of the metaphor of lifeblood. Without the oxygen and nutrients the blood carries to them, our vital organs would before long falter and cease to function. Without a constant flow of life-giving funds—and the spirit of devotion and sacrifice that provides them—the institutions of our Faith and their many agencies would be without means to carry out their plans and activities, vital to the progress of our Faith and the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a unified world civilization. Let us not be the ones to fail Him; let us, instead, rally the same dedication, faithfulness, ingenuity, and enterprise that has attracted Divine confirmations and blessings and enabled our storied community to surmount so many past hurdles. We can and will do it!

Our warm affection, our admiration for all you do in the pathway of service, and our prayers for your great success, happiness, and well-being surround you at all times.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juana C. Conrad". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Juana C. Conrad
Treasurer