

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

March 19, 2016

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

Dearly loved Friends,

As we open this first month on our Bahá'í calendar, we offer you, one and all, our loving best wishes for a blessed new year.

Only a few weeks separate us from the Festival of Ridván, which will this year mark the conclusion of the current Five Year Plan. With great pleasure, we share with you the joyous news that our national goal of establishing programs of growth in at least 600 clusters is nearly won! At this writing, 595 programs of growth are in operation across the country and there is every reason for confidence we will close the remaining gap in the days leading up to Plan's end. Our hearts are filled with gratitude to the Blessed Beauty for His unfailing guidance and confirmations, and to you, the faithful community of the Greatest Name in America, whose tireless efforts, often sacrificial, have yielded such a wonderful result.

Throughout the winter just concluded, many of you have been preparing for the new Five Year Plan that will commence at Ridván through individual and collective study of the Universal House of Justice's significant letters of December 29 and January 2, addressed respectively to the conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors in the Holy Land and to the Bahá'ís of the world. Preparations are also being made at the national and regional levels to ensure the community's immediate engagement with the formidable tasks that await us in the new Plan. To this end, the national institutional meeting—held in mid-February in Pensacola, Florida—was of immense importance, as its purpose was to study the Supreme Body's guidance in depth and to organize continued support for every cluster where a program of growth is now in place.

Among the more than 330 participants in this gathering were the members of the Continental Board of Counselors residing in the United States, together with members of their Auxiliary Boards; the members of the Regional Bahá'í Councils and Regional Training Institute boards; the regional institute coordinators and regional development facilitators; the junior youth learning-site coordinators; and the members of the National Spiritual Assembly and various members of our Bahá'í National Center staff. We were delighted as well to welcome contingents of friends from Alaska and Bermuda and a few guests from Canada, who helped lend a truly "North American spirit" to the occasion. Finally, two Counselor members of the International Teaching Center were present as our honored guests, and their contributions to our understanding were incalculable.

We would be hard pressed in the limited space of this message to convey the substance of our deliberations, much less their remarkable spiritual energy. In an atmosphere elevated, in part, by the conference's frequent devotional and artistic interludes, with hearts turned toward the Beloved of the World and spirits united by unshakeable faith in His Supreme Institution, the assemblage of believers in attendance represented a veritable microcosm of the American Bahá'í community: old and young; new believers and veterans of many decades; of African, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and European descent; immigrant and native-born—together they served as a potent reminder of the transforming and unifying power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. The friends emerged from this historic gathering

refreshed and renewed, with clarity of purpose and abundant confidence that our community will rise to these challenging words of the Universal House of Justice:

The coming global endeavour to which the friends will be summoned calls for the application of proven strategies, systematic action, informed analysis, and keen insight. Yet above all, it is a spiritual enterprise, and its true character should never be obscured. The urgency to act is impelled by the world's desperate condition. All that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have learned in the last twenty years must culminate in the accomplishments of the next five.

A century ago this week, 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed the first of 14 Tablets of the Divine Plan, in which He foresaw, from the efforts of a then small, obscure, and insignificant Bahá'í community, the eventual spiritual conquest of the planet. We can certainly marvel at the heroic achievements of our community over the course these past hundred years. More important, we can be grateful for—and seize upon—the precious opportunity we possess to make a contribution of our own to the upbuilding of God's long-awaited Kingdom, with absolute assurance in the ultimate triumph of our efforts.

As our beloved Master wrote:

Now you must become heavenly farmers and scatter pure seeds in the prepared soil. The harvest of every other seed is limited, but the bounty and the blessing of the seed of the divine teachings is unlimited. Throughout the coming centuries and cycles many harvests will be gathered. Consider the work of former generations. During the lifetime of Jesus Christ the believing, firm souls were few and numbered, but the heavenly blessings descended so plentifully that in a number of years countless souls entered beneath the shadow of the Gospel. God has said in the Qur'án: "One grain will bring forth seven sheaves, and every sheaf shall contain one hundred grains." In other words, one grain will become seven hundred; and if God so wills He will double these also. It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation. Now we must not consider our ability and capacity, nay, rather, we must fix our gaze upon the favors and bounties of God, in these days, Who has made of the drop a sea, and of the atom a sun.

Be ever assured of our admiration and deepest love, of our continual and ardent prayers for your happiness and the great success of your efforts for this sacred Cause.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
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Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary