

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

September 6, 2016

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

Dearly loved Friends,

With delight, we share with you a report we received recently from an individual believer, reflecting on experiences in the San Diego cluster where, as a result of steady, patient, and energetic efforts, the friends are learning how to work together to strengthen the pattern of action in support of the current Five Year Plan. Her thoughts were shared in hopes they would assist and inspire the friends similarly serving throughout the country. The following is a condensed version; the report in its entirety is available in the September-October edition of *The American Bahá'í*:

"Divine assistance. Our work requires us to rely on the power of prayer and divine assistance. Daily we pray to Bahá'u'lláh and beg Him to confirm us in serving His chosen ones. We recite the prayer for the Western States from the Tablets of the Divine Plan, we say the prayer revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for San Diego, and we pray for the souls that are ready to be guided to us and for us to be guided to them.

"Establishing friendships. Bolstered by the power of prayer, we exert ourselves to reach out, to expand our social circles and ultimately our friendships. . . . [W]e have examined our priorities, including the services we are rendering the Faith, and have striven to reorder our lives so to allow ourselves more time for interaction with our relatives, friends, and co-workers.

"Home visits and elevated conversation. Recognizing the interconnection of the disintegrating and integrating processes occurring in the world . . . is critical to the teaching work. Our visits with seekers in their homes and in ours create a space to share with them the Word of God. . . . Through sharing a prayer with them, they feel a peace and their hearts are moved.

"Starting regular devotional gatherings. In our community, a weekly women's devotional was begun in this way, sharing a prayer for the departed with a Christian friend who had come over for a visit. She loved it so much that we asked her, 'What do you think about getting some women from the neighborhood to pray together and offer spiritual support for each other on a weekly basis?' Soon, she was inviting her friends to join as well and even held it in her home when the Bahá'í hosting the devotional was out of town. Now this devotional gathering has evolved into a study circle.

"Inviting friends to study the institute sequence. We had been meeting for a few months to say prayers together and deepen on a spiritual topic each week. One week, the idea to weave in an art project, painting sea stones from Torrey Pines beach with words of inspiration, was presented and the women loved the art project. The next week, we described Ruhi Book 1, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, and asked, 'Would you be interested in trying it out for a couple of weeks and seeing what you think?' They all agreed to try and are now almost through the third unit of that course. The participants, including two seekers from the neighborhood, also are doing home visits and studying prayers together and with others. Ruhi Book 2, *Arising to Serve*, was recently introduced and one of the seekers right away said, 'We can host it at my house!'

"Supporting a monthly devotional gathering. The idea of hosting a monthly devotional gathering where we can invite friends and families to come together in prayer to one common God has resonated with many in our study circle and neighborhood. We have started one in our neighborhood where study circle participants are attending, bringing their families, and

extending the invitation to acquaintances and friends. People long for this. And once they experience the power of the Word of God, coupled with the love, unity, acceptance, and sincere friendship of those participating in these gatherings, those who are receptive continue to come back. In the most recent three-month cycle, 43 seekers attended these gatherings.

"Cohesion among core activities. We are also seeing the cohesion that is created between the core activities as neighborhood children share prayers learned in children's classes at these devotional gatherings, and seekers involved in study circles are mentioning them in conversations with new neighbors coming to the devotional gatherings. . . .

"[W]e want those participating in one core activity to connect with the others and have their whole family engaged if possible.

"Teaching teams. Teaching teams have been central to the effectiveness of our work. It is in these small groupings that we are able to study the guidance more effectively, consult together on teaching opportunities, build confidence and enthusiasm for teaching, and support each other in practical ways.

"Support from cluster institutions and agencies. The sacred work taking place . . . would not be nearly as effective or fruitful without the close involvement of the representatives of institutions and agencies of the Faith. Many have visited the work in the neighborhood and lent their support shoulder to shoulder with us. They have also offered practical help in our sector. For instance, our dear study circle coordinator has stepped in as a tutor on several occasions when the regular tutor was unavailable, and our dear junior youth coordinator has met with us on short notice and helped us learn the language and vision of the junior youth program so that we could articulate it to neighborhood parents.

"Press on! While we are learning through a lot of trial and error, and definitely go through ups and downs by learning through action, praise be to God, we are assured of ultimate success if we but continue with the efforts, ever widening the circle of participation, raising the level of activity, strengthening the pattern of community life, and enhancing our capacity and the capacity of others to undertake systematic action within the framework of the Plan. We have close to four cycles only before the bicentenary of our beloved Lord's birth. The steps we take both individually and collectively during these fleeting months, and the achievements that come as a result, will constitute, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, 'an offering of ardent love, yielded collectively to Him Who is the Unifier of the world on the bicentenary of His Birth.'"

Dearest friends, while each cluster will doubtless find its own developmental path, all will flourish through adherence to these same core principles. Prayerful, united, and systematic service of the kind described in the foregoing paragraphs, in cluster after cluster and in a spirit of learning, will surely propel us toward decisive victory. Be assured of our abiding love and our prayers that the Beloved of the World will bless, guide, and confirm you in this service.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary