

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

July 11, 2017

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

Dearly loved Friends,

From clusters across the country, exciting news of the imaginative preparations you are making for October's 200th anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's Birth continues to reach us. Most impressive are the plans demonstrating your resolve that the bicentenaries of both Twin Holy Birthdays be more than occasions celebrated once and consigned to memory. Instead, they have the potential to endure as milestones marking the progress of our continuing conversation with fellow Americans on the Person and teachings of the Blessed Beauty, strengthening the bonds of shared spiritual aspirations with friends of the Faith, and inviting them to join us in the building of a peaceful and just world.

One example of this comes to us from New York, where believers in one of the city's boroughs seized on this year's celebrations of Naw-Rúz as a perfect opportunity to refine their skills in inviting friends and contacts to take part in a Bahá'í event. They further took inspiration from similar efforts of believers in Chile and Australia, as described by one of the participants:

At our previous Feast in Brooklyn, we used the consultation portion to determine whether we should have a central Naw-Rúz celebration in Brooklyn or [have] more neighborhood-level gatherings. After quite a lengthy consultation, we felt the most important principle in making this decision would be which format would facilitate the friends making a greater effort to invite seekers to the celebrations. A few friends from [New York] who had gone to the Temple opening in Chile shared how each Bahá'í had been charged with having 10 meaningful conversations culminating in an invitation to visit the House of Worship, and suggested we might make a similar effort to invite friends to celebrate Naw-Rúz with us. A few friends shared that they would feel more comfortable inviting their friends if they knew what the space would be like, thus the decision was made for teaching teams and other small groups of friends to host their own celebrations. We also decided that at the Feast of Bahá, we would report back on our celebrations.

At our Feast last night, representatives from different teams who hosted celebrations shared [reports] about each gathering, and from those present, it appears that we had somewhere in the range of 60–70 seekers (likely somewhere closer to 65) attend five Naw-Rúz celebrations throughout Brooklyn. The smallest gathering attracted five seekers and the largest 20.

A friend visiting from [Australia] . . . shared with us that in Sydney the community has set the goal of having 250,000 people attend Bicentenary celebrations over an entire week. [T]hese celebrations would range from service projects organized by junior youth groups to more formal gatherings at the grounds of the House of Worship where dignitaries would be invited. . . . [T]he focus of the community would be on the process of inviting people rather than the number itself. . . .

Applying this principle, the friends guiding the efforts in Sydney decided they would use the next two cycles to try to extend these invitations . . . to 250,000 souls. [The

visitor] shared that crucial to this process is thinking of the invitation as not just an invitation to an event, but an invitation to a process of learning about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and about a process of building vibrant communities. She shared that in the next two cycles there will be frequent gatherings for the friends to practice direct teaching, looking at relevant sections from [Ruhi] Books 4 and 6, so that a growing number of friends feels confident to share about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh with ease.

At our Feast last night, there was a lot of excitement around the idea of embracing a loftier vision for the bicentenary celebrations, and really applying ourselves to reach the multitudes. It may be worth considering whether this process will gain momentum without the full support and guidance of the cluster agencies serving New York City consulting and assisting the friends in every borough and neighborhood team to make robust, bold, and daring plans over the next two cycles. How beautiful it would be to know that we truly “strained every nerve” in reaching the masses to invite them to celebrate these sacred occasions. . . . And for further context, the gathering that had 20 seekers was initiated by a woman who was so moved by the Chile example she committed herself to inviting 10 people to a celebration in her home. Those 10 invited their own friends, resulting in 20 non-Bahá'ís coming to her home to celebrate Naw-Rúz. She cried profusely as she shared this story with us.

Dear friends! This narrative shows us what can happen if we take action with confidence in the potentialities of this unique moment in our history—a period of time characterized by the Universal House of Justice as constituting “the single greatest worldwide opportunity there has ever been for connecting hearts to Bahá'u'lláh.”

We look forward to receiving many more wonderful stories of the results of your faithful efforts—in this never-to-be-repeated bicentennial year—to tell other souls of the coming of the Promised One of All Ages. Be assured all the while that our prayers for His blessings and confirmations accompany you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary