

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

December 8, 2017

To the American Bahá'í community

Beloved Friends and Co-workers:

With hearts filled with admiration and deepest gratitude, we salute your efforts to joyfully and meaningfully commemorate the appearance in the world two centuries ago of Bahá'u'lláh, the One Whom posterity will acclaim as “the Judge, the Lawgiver and Redeemer of all mankind.” How infinitely precious was every opportunity the Bicentenary of His Birth afforded us to celebrate—with countless friends and contacts in neighborhoods, towns, and cities across the land—the immeasurable import of His example and teachings and the incalculable impact they are destined to have on the future of life on this planet!

In the United States, the Bicentenary events were attended by some 120,000 people, nearly two-thirds of them not members of the Faith. Impressive as this is, far more moving to us were stories we received from hundreds of individuals about their personal efforts to engage in meaningful conversations about the Blessed Beauty and His teachings. These testify to the devotion of the community, the receptivity of our fellow citizens, and the confirmations that descended upon all who arose to share the divine message.

Wonderful as those days were, their ultimate success will not be judged by what we did, but by what we now do. This year by no means represented the zenith of our potential as promulgators of this Cause. Rather, it fortified us for bolder and more effective teaching efforts in the years ahead. Our ardent prayer is that the spirit of teaching will so suffuse our individual and collective lives as to make of us a continually growing and invincible force for the creation of a society founded on principles of divine justice.

The time has come for a vast increase in the number and range of individual and collective teaching initiatives. Among them, devotional gatherings—where others are invited to join us in prayer and reflection on the sacred texts—can often open hearts to elevated conversations about the life and teachings of the Blessed Beauty. Continued screenings of *Light to the World*, coupled with discussions relating His unifying teachings to the current state of our society, will surely generate interest on the part of countless souls. A great increase in the number of firesides—where seekers have the opportunity to learn about the Faith in an atmosphere of warm hospitality—can in the aggregate serve to introduce many thousands to Bahá'u'lláh's message. Regular home visits will strengthen bonds of loving friendship and will help us to better understand each other's hopes and aspirations. Celebrations of coming Holy Days can have the same impact as those we just experienced. And there is no limit to the potential that resides in creative use of the arts as a means of attracting receptive souls. In all these and other efforts, let us introduce the universal message of Bahá'u'lláh, study His writings, and explore with our friends and contacts their implications for the reconstruction of the world. Let us see each as a portal to service, inviting those so inclined into other efforts in which we can together join hands in applying the Bahá'í teachings to the building of a new pattern of community life.

We have made historic strides in recent years, powered primarily by skills and insights we have gained from the training institute experience. Especially noteworthy is the unprecedented involvement of friends of the Faith in the life of the Bahá'í community.

Of the 40,000 people now participating in core activities nationwide, approximately a third are not enrolled members of the Faith. Further, they represent a great diversity of ages and backgrounds. The achievement is significant because it reflects the spirit of love and inclusiveness that should characterize all our community's endeavors. It also reflects an understanding that all are on a spiritual journey and all are valued contributors to the task of changing the world. In our most advanced clusters, where hundreds and more are participating, we are beginning to see the emergence of regular cycles of expansion and consolidation, engagement in social action, and contributing to social discourse—in which those who until recently were unaware of the Faith are now actively involved and increasingly taking charge of their spiritual destinies.

Such emerging patterns are both an important form of growth and the foundation for sustained expansion. Yet it is essential to understand that a steady increase in the number of avowed believers is also critical and should not be regarded as a separate matter, but a natural outcome of our efforts to foster the development of an inclusive and diverse community. We seek to create the best conditions for every soul to become engaged in our community-building work, to serve and to progress, aware that each person will have different inclinations and move at a different pace. Our approach must be characterized by wisdom—always in a spirit of loving invitation, yet teaching each person according to his or her capacities and receptivity, ultimately assisting as many as possible to recognize the coming of the Promised One of All Ages.

On a practical level, we must ensure that each person we engage feels welcome to participate according to his or her interests. Some might benefit from home visits as a prelude to further engagement. Some might attend firesides all the way to enrollment before participating in institute training. Others might be eager to begin the sequence of institute courses right away. Some might attend devotional gatherings for a considerable length of time before taking part in another activity. Some will immediately engage with us in service, while others will take more time. Some may be ready sooner, others later, to formally embrace the Faith. Some may first associate with us as children or junior youth, later to be followed by their friends and family members. In every case, we must be inviting to all yet flexible in our approach, firmly assured that the confluence of all paths ultimately makes for a coherent scheme for progress. Whether serving individually or in teams, whether in focus neighborhoods or throughout our clusters, much will depend on our capacity successfully to welcome, nurture, and walk with every soul.

Dear friends! Your achievements during the Bicentenary amply proved the current potential for teaching. Go forward, then, with faith—faith that what you are striving to accomplish is God's will for the day in which we live. That it is His will for humanity to live as one family; that it is His will for every single human being to live up to his or her full potential; that it is His will for peace and justice to fill every land and for love to reign in every heart. Be certain of His assistance. He knows you, He watches over and protects you, and He brings you victory—because you are the soldiers in His Army of Light!

With assurance of our ardent prayers,
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