

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

September 26, 2019

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

Dearly loved Friends,

Reports on manifold and diverse efforts across the country advancing the Five Year Plan—and anticipating the fast-approaching bicentenary of the Blessed Báb's Birth—continue to hearten us. Over the summer months, unprecedented levels of activity involving hundreds of young believers have particularly delighted us, as they plainly testify to the energy, vitality, and dedication of a segment of our community whose wholehearted participation is essential to our progress.

Examples illustrating the powerful impact of young believers' efforts—both in the clusters they are serving and on themselves—abound in the reports we are receiving. A few excerpts from these reports follow:

In the South Central region, the “Lights and Suns” campaign in northern Texas helped 65 youth advance in the sequence of courses. Immediately after, 30 youth participated in a summer of service program and contributed not only to an increase in activity in a few neighborhoods of their home clusters—including 7 new junior youth groups, 3 children's classes, and 2 study circles—but clarified their vision of what is needed for growth. One young person, who served as a facilitator for a team of youth during the summer, reflected that:

“Developing capacity doesn't just mean tutoring participants in a Ruhi book and then sending them off to their respective communities with the new information they learned in the study circle. It means taking them along with you to every part of the process—the outreach, follow-ups, home visits, groups, camps, etc. If they don't get to witness the process in its entirety, the capacity to consolidate consistent activity in their home communities is lower because they don't have concrete examples to base their efforts on.”

Efforts have been underway in the Heartland region to increase the connection between the communities in Chicagoland and the Bahá'í House of Worship. A three-day institute camp with 30 youth was held at the national Hazíratu'l-Quds, culminating in a devotional that the youth planned and carried out in the House of Worship. For one young man, it was his first time visiting the Temple, and he said a prayer by memory that he had learned in Book 1 during those days. Friends involved in activities have been coming to the House of Worship, increasingly on their own, and bringing others with them. After visiting the Temple, one young adult from the Rogers Park neighborhood said, “Now I know this is my home. I have Bahá'í prayers [and] I know what they mean . . . so now I know I can come anytime to pray here, because this is my home.”

In addition, two groups of youths from neighborhoods in San Diego made the trip across the country to the House of Worship: 16 traveled from the City Heights neighborhood during August, and 20 from the Linda Vista neighborhood over Labor Day weekend.

Both groups met with a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, received a guided tour of the House of Worship, prepared a devotional gathering at the Temple, visited the [National] Archives, and visited the city of Chicago. . . . Along the way, they joined a community dinner at the Native American Bahá'í Institute in Arizona and visited with youth in Kansas City, including some Congolese friends who had previously lived in City Heights. The three days spent in the vicinity of the Temple were an opportunity for the youth to strengthen their relationship with the Faith and to reflect on the connection between worship and service. One youth shared with a local friend that he was in heaven [for] the whole visit. Prior to the trip, he had been attracted to many concepts he was learning about, including true friendship, while he also had a lot of questions about prayer. Coming to the Temple helped him learn the meaning of prayer and what it means to be grateful to God, and he felt that God had been guiding him all along. In his own words, "The wonderful thing is, I didn't find God just on my own. I'm finding God with a group of friends. That's amazing."

Finally, we were overjoyed to learn that during the summer two additional clusters—the "NoVa East" cluster in Virginia and Albuquerque, New Mexico—had reached the third milestone on the continuum of growth. These make for a new national total of 21, and there is a strong possibility that a few more clusters may attain this stage of growth by the time of the bicentenary.

As the brief excerpts above show, the real story is not about numbers but is, rather, about people whose hearts are being transformed through interaction with the Word of God and service in the field of action. In our most advanced clusters, the story includes both Bahá'ís and their friends—diverse in age as well as in other respects—now actively involved in and enriching the life of their communities. Indeed, in all of them the most significant inroads are being made in neighborhoods primarily composed of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian people—or mixtures of these and a variety of immigrant groups. This is a marvelous portent of the potential our Bahá'í community possesses to reflect the full diversity of the American nation, though it is as yet only a beginning. Our task remains to so consecrate ourselves to our community-building work that these and many other clusters will continue their advance from strength to strength.

Be assured of the deepest gratitude and abiding love we feel for each and every one of you, and of our unceasing prayers for your great success in the all-important work in which you are engaged.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary