



# Annual Report Pūrongo Ā-Tau

180 B.E. | 2023-2024

Second year of the Nine Year Plan

Te tau tuarua o ngā whaingā  
o ngā tau e iwa e whai ake nei



Journeying through 'a sacred  
twenty-five-year venture,  
generational in its scope and  
significance'

The Annual Report reviews the achievements and learning of the Bahá'í community of New Zealand during the last year. It is informed by reports received from local, regional and national institutions and agencies.

FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

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**National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand**

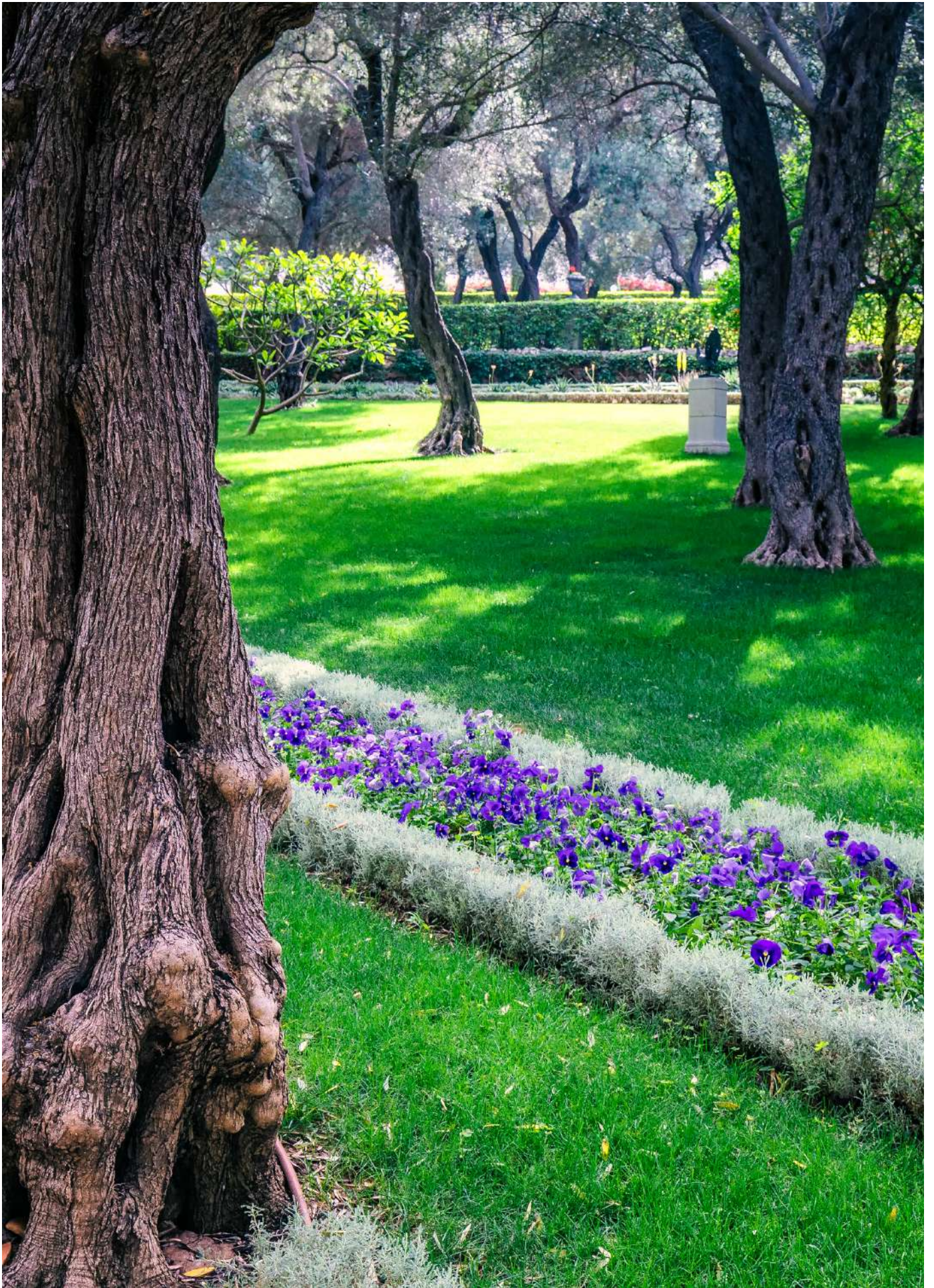
**Te Runanga Wairua Tapu  
o Ngā Bahá'í o Aotearoa**

# **Annual Report Pūrongo Ā-Tau 180 B.E.**

*“The diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity, a greater consciousness of global interdependence, the embrace of collaborative action among individuals and institutions, and a heightened longing for justice and peace are profoundly transforming human relationships. And thus, the movement of the world towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision advances in countless halting steps, in occasional dramatic leaps, and with intermittent stretches where progress stalls or is even reversed, as humanity forges the relationships that constitute the foundations of a united and peaceful world.”*

*The Universal House of Justice, 28 November 2023 to the Bahá'ís of the World*









**Message from the Universal House of Justice in  
response to the message from the  
New Zealand National Convention, 180 B.E.**

*Our hearts were gladdened to receive the loving message from the delegates at your National Convention and to learn of the rich consultations that took place at that gathering, which included inspiring accounts of the progress being made by youth and groups of families to take charge of their own spiritual, social, and material progress. Your community has realized the strength and beauty to be found in embracing diversity, which will no doubt greatly fortify its efforts to widen the circle of unity still further. As the friends in New Zealand arise, with unrestrained fervour, to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures, we will supplicate in the Holy Shrines on their behalf, that their every effort to serve the Cause may be reinforced by the Company on high.*

**The Universal House of Justice, 11 July 2023**







### **Tauparapara\***

*Uia ake nei, Ko Wai kei tua – (And I ask Who is beyond?)  
Tēra te Matarangi e tū tāukiuki i te Ararewa – (That is the Primal Point standing strong,  
standing tall upon the Exalted Path).  
E ara nei ki te kokomea, e marohirohi i te ahuahungaroa – (As the sun sets [at the end of the  
previous Dispensation] the All Powerful, the Immutable, has come to transmute all.  
Ko te Mātahi o te ao kei runga - Exalted be the Primal Point,  
Ko Te Waharoa o te ora – The Gate of Life  
Ki te whenua – To the Earth  
Ka ao ka ao – To the skies  
ka awatea! – It will be light!  
Tihei mauriora. – Tis the breath of life.*

\* The Tauparapara refers to the moment when Mullá Husayn first laid eyes on the Báb at the gates of Shiraz

*Kei aku whetu ngātahi i te tī,  
Kei aku ara pūahoaho i te tā e whakatārai i te tūāpapa o tēnei whare, te whare o te  
kotahitanga, hei whakaruruhau mo ngāi tāngata e haere ake nei.  
Tēna koutou, tēnā tātou.  
Ki tō tātou Atua, te Orokohanga o ngā mea katoa, te kikokiko, te aroha whāioio, korōria ki  
Tōu Tūranga Tapu.  
Ki a koutou ngā toa whakaihuwaka e kōkiri i ngā ōhaki o Bahá'u'lláh, e whanake i ngā  
taāurahere o te ora, e whakaata nei a 'Abdu'l-Bahá.  
Matika mai ra!  
Maranga mai ra!  
Ki a koutou e whakaara i te aroha, i te māramatanga, i te kotahitanga, e hōrapa kau ake i te  
whenua, e whakarangatira i a rātou kua takahi kētia i te ara whānui, rā ngā mangainga e  
honohono ake rā.  
Nei rā ngā mihi,  
Anei te Te Runanga Wairua Bahá'í o Aotearoa e whakawhetai ki te Atua hei whakawaerea i tā  
tātou ara, e whatu i te aroha-mauroa ki a tātou katoa.  
Tēnā Koutou  
Tēnā koutou  
Alláh'u'Abhá*

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The first part of the Annual Report presents the National Spiritual Assembly's perspective on the accomplishments and challenges of the past year and a summary of developments in the main areas of endeavour.

### **Key themes of the year's endeavour** **Ngā kaupapa matua o ngā whāinga tau**

These remarks from the National Assembly focus on the community's progress in relation to key themes for advancing the Cause and helping to release more of its society-building power in the immediate future.

### **Key achievements and hopes** **Ngā whakatutukitanga matua me ngā hiahia**

The National Assembly highlights some of the community's most significant achievements of the year and shares its hopes for the reaping of opportunities before us.

### **Review of major activities and achievements** **Ngā arotakenga o ngā ngohe matua me ngā whakatutukitanga nui**

This brief review looks at progress that has been made in the movement of clusters, learning from advanced clusters, educational endeavours and the training institute, contributing to social transformation, and raising capacity for administration. It also looks at pioneering and several other notable developments.

### **Financial Report** **He pūrongo pūtea**

Reflections on the development of the National Fund, and financial analysis.

## Key themes of the year's endeavour Ngā kaupapa matua o ngā whāinga tau

As always, it has been a privilege for the National Spiritual Assembly to serve the New Zealand community in 180 B.E.

Our sense of responsibility extends beyond the Bahá'í community, and indeed we are seeing an ever-greater sense of outward orientation by all of the Bahá'í institutions, agencies, individuals and communities in Aotearoa towards embracing ever-widening circles in the orbit within which we are all striving to “release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures.” (30 Dec 2021 message of the House of Justice to Conference of the Counsellors)

This mid-way point of the first phase of the Nine Year Plan frames the annual report, and will also frame the National Convention's deliberations, keeping the perspective of history fully in view. As we know, many of the approaches that need to be undertaken by individuals, communities and institutions are being reshaped in the Nine Year Plan. As conditions in society worsen, it is even more important that all of these three protagonists and the relationships among them, are influenced more strongly by the Writings of our Faith and the guidance of the beloved Universal House of Justice.

The National Assembly had in the first year of the Plan, identified some key themes for advancing the Cause and helping to release more of its society-building power in the immediate future, namely:

- The training institute will have more impact on our society as the flow into the main sequence of courses increases, with more people engaging with and taking ownership of the training institute's development, and as the quality of the educational processes increases.
- More friends learning to act in groups of families and households to build community.
- Enhancing institutional capacity at local, cluster, regional and national levels.
- Increased experience with the natural coherence between the three areas of endeavour: expansion and consolidation, social action and participation in the discourses of society.

In perusing the annual report, the reader will gauge for themselves what progress has been or is being made around the country in each of these four areas. From the National Assembly's perspective, there has been a definite shift in the way a growing number of believers are engaging in the processes of the Plan. Although we are still not seeing a flow into the courses of the institute, there is a stronger understanding gaining hold in the minds of friends of the “seamless coherent educational experience from the age of five, upwards to the age of junior youth, and through into adulthood...” (ibid) However, viewing the curricular materials “as a direct counterpart to the pattern of activities unfolding at the grassroots” (ibid) is yet to be fully reflected in the numbers of core activities. This undoubtedly requires a much deeper, internalised recognition by a greater number of friends that the training institute is truly the engine of growth.



The concept of groups of families learning and acting together to build a community life is being embraced more widely than this time last year, as more and more examples arise of successful undertakings of this nature in a variety of settings, showing the applicability of this strategy in neighbourhoods of varying types.

Institutions at all levels are populated by many consecrated souls, who are serving diligently. Local Spiritual Assembly development is a continuum, of which our 40 Local Assemblies range across a wide span. Time, energy and commitment are resources that all individuals serving on an institution bring to their service to the degree possible, and busy people have limits to these resources. It is therefore heartening to observe that oftentimes institutions are working out ways to operate at more strategic levels, implementing frameworks to guide the work, following learning in systematic ways, and delegating those tasks that the members themselves are not required to undertake. A maturation process is occurring organically, as the demands of growth require the Assemblies at national and local levels to manage increasing complexity. Certain programmes when implemented, say for Local Assemblies, can have a strong impact on the way such an institution perceives and handles a particular area of its work. The impact of the spiritual health programme for Local Assemblies, and the ongoing support and advice of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants in this area of the work, for example, has shown demonstrable progress in the way some Local Assemblies are now handling cases of spiritual ill-health in their community.

It seems that many friends are making valiant efforts to shake off and rise above the prevailing social forces, including apathy, and grounding their beings firmly in the Revelation to empower, strengthen, and motivate them. There is a growing sense of the importance of connectedness in the face of negative social forces. Unity is being enhanced as friends pursue together a common goal. A collective spiritual enterprise gives strength, purpose and meaning to one's life when directed towards the goals of the Faith. The coming together of around 100 youth in Auckland for a Bahá'í youth conference in January; the elevated spirit of the Faith in intensive institute camps or seminars, such as the ISGP undergraduate seminar in February; the vibrant, joyful summer schools held over the summer period; the wonderful spirit of the National Convention; the increased numbers of friends attending cluster reflection meetings; and many other examples, demonstrate this.

*“As the spiritual energies released by earnest pursuit of the Plan surge, they meet resistance from the countervailing forces that hold humanity back from attaining full maturity. In the face of such forces, the vitality of the various lines of action being followed at the local level needs to be preserved and fortified.” (ibid)*

As a more widespread culture of sacrificial service takes firm root in the hearts and minds of friends around the country and is fortified through collective action, a natural outcome of this will be a pioneering mindset more firmly embedded in the thoughts and actions of believers. This greater consciousness of pioneering as something all families naturally consider at some point in their lives, is another theme of some significance, that has emerged with greater prominence in 180 B.E.



## Key achievements and hopes

### Ngā whakatutukitanga matua me ngā hiahia

An acknowledgement of significant achievements during the year and the National Assembly's hopes of what is to come

#### **Achievements of the Community of the Most Great Name in Aotearoa**

*“The series of global Plans that began at Riḍván will last a full twenty-five years. It will carry the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá’í Era and conclude at Riḍván 2046. During this period, the Bahá’í world will be focused on a single aim: the release of the society building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. The pursuit of this overall aim will require a further rise in the capacity of the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions of the Faith. These three constant protagonists of the Plan each have a part to play, and each one has capacities and qualities that must be developed. However, each is incapable of manifesting its full potential on its own. It is by strengthening their dynamic relationships with one another that their powers are combined and multiplied. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the more the qualities of cooperation and mutual assistance are manifested by a people, ‘the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity’; in the Faith, this principle distinguishes and shapes the interactions of individuals, institutions, and communities, and it endows the body of the Cause with moral vigour and spiritual health.”*

~ From a message dated 30 December 2021 of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Counsellors

The National Assembly has observed a notable rise in the capacities of all three protagonists in the Plan, and an increased strength and dynamism in the relationships amongst them. An outstanding example of this was the way in which individuals, institutions and communities interacted with loving and patient collaboration to serve this year's summer school development with a new format, arising to the challenge in a relatively short span of time to produce worthwhile summer schools enjoyed by hundreds of friends around the country.





## Hopes of the National Assembly

*“All men’ Bahá’u’lláh asserts, ‘have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.’ This, rather than the mere accumulation of religious converts, is the elevated goal towards which all our efforts in the teaching field are directed. The central purpose of the training institute process is to raise up human resources who can contribute to this objective.”*

~ From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual dated 23 August 2018

We know that the power to act resides primarily with the believers, and that this power is unlocked when an individual takes initiative of their own will and when the body of the believers has a collective will to undertake the mission of the Faith. Taking a more expansive view of the training institute as “a potent means for the society-building power of the Faith to find release” (30 Dec 2021 message of the House of Justice to the Conference of the Counsellors) will enable friends to fully understand the potential impact that this educational system can make on society, and how this “requires many individuals to lend their support to its further development” (ibid) and to see this as an investment “in those who will assume responsibility for collective social progress”. (ibid)

*“One of the greatest challenges before all the institutions of the Faith during this Formative Age is the development of local communities, communities that are characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and a collective will. It is these communities that serve as the environment in which the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers are multiplied in unified action.”*

~ Universal House of Justice, The Institution of the Counsellors, p. 21

The beloved Guardian has said that the turmoil of the present age evokes sorrows, excites fears, produces disillusionment, creates perplexities, arouses indignation, provokes revolt, engenders grievances, and awakens the spirit of restless search – all of which provide a precious opportunity to spread “*far and wide, the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.*” And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote that the Bahá’ís must make our steps so firm in the Cause that nothing will shake our resolve, no matter how dire the calamities that assail the world: “*By nothing, under no conditions, be ye perturbed. Be ye anchored fast as the high mountains, be stars that dawn over the horizon of life, be bright lamps in the gatherings of unity, be souls innocent in heart. Be ye symbols of guidance and lights of godliness, severed from the world, clinging to the handhold that is sure and strong, spreading abroad the spirit of life, riding the Ark of salvation. Be ye daysprings of generosity, dawning-points of the mysteries of existence, sites where inspiration alighteth, rising-places of splendours, souls that are sustained by the Holy Spirit, enamoured of the Lord, detached from all save Him, holy above the characteristics of humankind, clothed in the attributes of the angels of heaven, that ye may win for yourselves the highest bestowal of all, in this new time, this wondrous age.*”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tell us that “*when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire’s distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it.*” It is only through arising to take initiative, all the while endeavouring with courage, perseverance and zeal, to face and overcome the challenges that come with service to God, that we grow in spiritual radiance.

This is the hope of the National Spiritual Assembly. This one hope encompasses all of the other hopes that this institution holds for the precious community of the Most Great Name in Aotearoa, because the Bahá’í community is charged with an historic mission. It must acquire capacity to address increasingly complex spiritual and material requirements as it grows in size.

And for humanity as a whole, we can only hope for greater heedfulness, discernment, and nobility.

## Society-Building Power

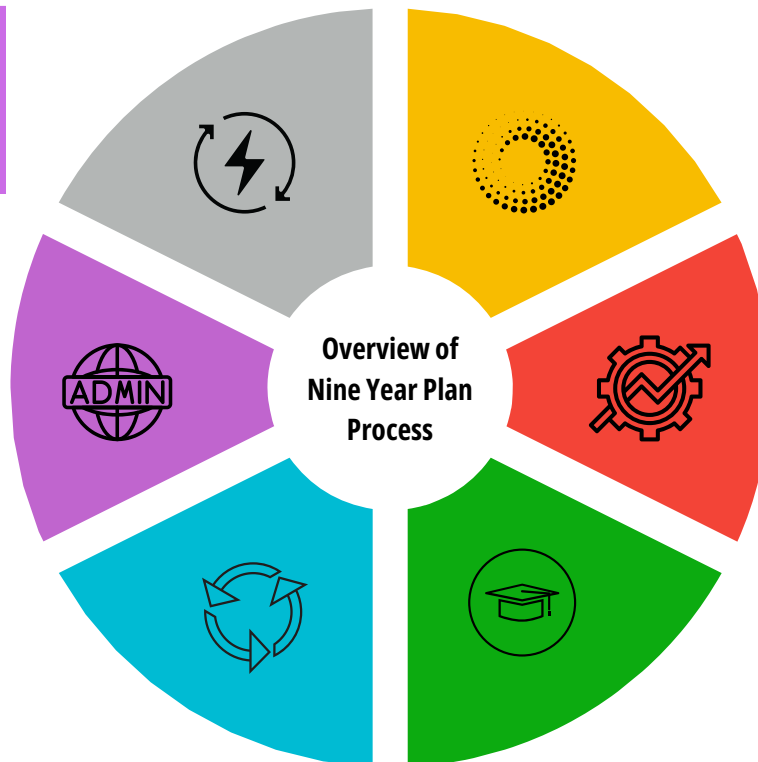
The enkindled souls being raised up... are seeking to gain an ever more profound understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings... and to apply them to the needs of their society.

## Movement of Clusters

- Still further advances in the process of entry by troops
- Passing milestones
- Role of 3rd milestone clusters
- Preparing for declarations by families and groups
- Fanning the passion for teaching

## Raising Capacity for Administration

- Coexistence of many lines of action
- Contributions of the Appointed Arm
- Administration at the grassroots and development of Local Assemblies
- The sacred electoral process
- Development of national institutions and agencies
- Material resources: funds, technology and property.



## Learning from Advanced Clusters

- Universal participation
- Intense activities in focus areas
- Service to everyone in the vicinity
- Local Spiritual Assemblies expanding their capacity
- Reading reality, setting goals, mapping path

## Contributing to Social Transformation

- Help improve the spiritual character and social conditions of the wider community
- Helping to overcome social, economic or cultural barriers to engagement in the life of society
- Building the capacity of everyone to serve
- Involvement in public discourses, in both formal and informal settings.

## Educational Endeavours and the Training Institute

- Transformation through education (in all forms)
- Growth of human resources
- A more expansive view of the training institute
- Enhancing the quality of the educational experience
- Involvement of every Bahá'í in refining the system
- Lifelong study of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation



Included in this section is a report on pioneering - providing an update on where we are at with meeting our international goals at this mid-point of the first phase of the Nine Year Plan.

## Review of major activities and achievements

### Ngā arotakenga o ngā ngohe matua me ngā whakatutukitanga nui

**This section provides an introduction and overview of developments which are described in detail in the reports of the Regional Bahá'í Councils, Regional Institute Boards and other bodies, in the second part of the Annual Report.**

This section provides an overview of the developments that have occurred in the regions – North Island and South Island.

Presented in the upcoming pages is a synopsis of endeavours undertaken during the past year, 180 B.E., marking the strides of our national community towards unleashing "the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures" – the overarching objective guiding the series of Plans leading up to Ridván 2046.

For ease of reference, this section is structured around the headings in the 'Overview of the Nine-Year Plan' diagram presented earlier. Sections in the diagram are derived from the guidance of the Universal House of Justice as conveyed to the Conference of the Counsellors in the Message dated 30 December 2021. As articulated in that message, society building entails *"learning how to raise up vibrant, outward-looking communities; it means those communities learning how to bring about spiritual and material progress; it means learning how to contribute to the discourses that influence the direction of that progress."*



A junior youth camp hosted by the Assembly of Hastings was held on 11-15 July 2023

Ensuring all of the basic elements of the system for community building are in place and the foundations are becoming increasingly solid in each cluster will enable clusters to advance at a faster pace. Among the most important elements are having a flow into the institute and operating in three-monthly cycles. Clusters are all on a continuum of growth and each cluster reads its own reality to determine what their next step needs to be and any adjustments that need to be made, based on a connection with the Universal House of Justice and guidance, keeping an outward orientation to widen the circle of participation, and remembering that it is the Word of God that generates spiritual energy that leads to movement. The devotional character of a locality or neighbourhood provides this spiritual energy.

Following on from the goals set at the beginning of 179 B.E., for clusters to reach certain milestones by 2026 and 2031, 180 B.E. began with some notable strides toward these goals. There has been a strong focus on advancing clusters with sustained programmes for the

education of children and junior youth with a particular focus on engaging local families. Summer and Winter Initiatives have boosted expansion and consolidation efforts. Clusters in both the North and South regions have prioritised the strengthening of nuclei by strengthening bonds between families through devotional spaces and family camps.

This past year has seen a strong push to emphasise achieving international pioneering goals set for New Zealand, fostering a greater sense of international connectedness with sister communities across the world. A trans-Tasman training institute gathering in Australia boosted understanding of the Nine Year Plan for both Regional Institute Boards. The post-pandemic resumption of a regional Summer School in the South Island, and sub-regional Summer Schools in the North Island, allowed for collaborative, interactive spaces to advance and inspire individuals into action, enkindling souls to arise to gain a more profound understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's remedy for society.





Wellington cluster institutional meeting with Counsellor Scrine

As the year unfolded, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of clusters across Aotearoa and their potential for advancement within the framework of the Nine Year Plan has emerged. This understanding has been catalysed by the directive from the Universal House of Justice for a global evaluation aimed at positioning communities towards the “possibilities for intensifying the process of growth”. This highlighted projections for progress by 2026 and 2031, goals that were set last year. The resulting outcomes for various clusters across the North and South Islands are highlighted in this section, with endeavours that mark the initial steps taken toward realising the vision of broadening and intensifying society-building activity on a scale never witnessed.

### Summary of cluster activity in 180 B.E.

In Auckland cluster, the focus is on fostering a seamless educational system involving the three educational imperatives (programme for the spiritual education of children, junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, and the main sequence of institute courses). Engaging and sustaining over 300 junior youth in the spiritual empowerment programme is a goal being fostered through collaboration among institutions and agencies, and the strengthening of material support for the educational endeavours. Manurewa, which is the most advanced neighbourhood in the country, is a key learning site as the intensity generated here offers rich insights.

In the North Island’s other third milestone cluster, Hawke’s Bay, a growth effort has been expanded, enabling the support of other nuclei, and enhancing systematisation through these collaboration efforts.

Waikato is working towards the third milestone, emphasising outreach in children’s programmes and building community relationships. In Wellington, progress towards the third milestone is being made with nuclei in multiple neighbourhoods and sustained educational programmes for children and junior youth.

Regarding the North Island’s other second milestone clusters, Tairāwhiti is rapidly progressing towards the third milestone with strong youth, junior youth and children’s programmes and continues to grow institutional strength.

In South Waikato/Taupō, advancement is being achieved through individual initiatives, devotional meetings, and youth engagement, fostering community-led activities and deepening fellowship amongst friends. Taranaki is maintaining elements of a second milestone cluster, focusing on the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme and holding regular youth events. Triumph is moving towards the third milestone, emphasising nuclei expansion and systematic family camps and festivals. In Rotorua, there's community momentum experienced through regular devotional gatherings.

Wairarapa aims to advance towards the third milestone with sustained children's classes and engagement of local families. Whangārei/Kaipara sees progress in youth transition and community engagement, with plans for regular camps and deeper community study. The Far North cluster exhibits potential for growth towards the third milestone, with notable developments in children's classes and greater engagement with Māori.

In the Eastern Bay of Plenty, efforts are focused on strengthening the core nucleus and planning for family camps. Western Bay of Plenty is concentrating on regular junior youth camps and expanding children's classes, while Thames/Coromandel is progressing primarily through strengthening family bonds through devotional spaces and family camps.

Of the two remaining first milestone clusters in the North Island, Ruapehu is strengthening the junior youth programme through pioneer support, while Waitomo/Ōtorohanga is expecting that a strengthened Waikato cluster will serve as a reservoir for tutors and pioneers to their (neighbouring) cluster.

In the South Island, Coastal Otago has made significant strides toward the 3rd milestone, and Central Canterbury is bolstering its capacity to serve as a supportive hub for the region.

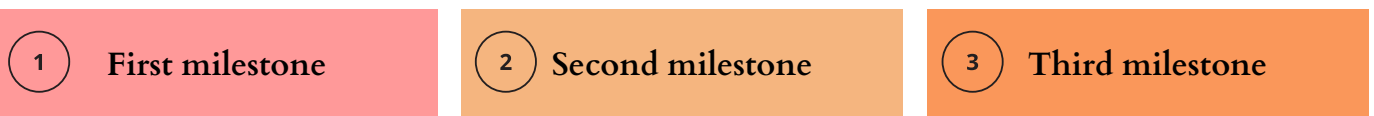
The strategy of fostering "groups of families" as an expanding nucleus has gained momentum across various clusters, including Queenstown (Central Otago cluster), Christchurch (Central Canterbury cluster), Auckland, Hawke's Bay, and Waikato. This approach entails connecting multiple households and creating collaborative opportunities for friends within these households to convene regularly for prayer, study, reflection, consultation, and service. Progress in implementing this strategy has been observed and propelled through Summer Initiative orientations. In Coastal Otago cluster and Central Canterbury, efforts are concentrated on supporting and enhancing capacity through collective study of Book 10 alongside members of the Regional Bahá'í Council and Auxiliary Board members. Central Canterbury has

established a rhythm of regular gatherings to analyse their cluster's reality and prepare for cluster reflection meetings, thereby strengthening unity of thought.

Several clusters are actively working to strengthen this rhythm propelled by cluster reflection meetings. Additionally, children's festivals are emerging as a promising mode of boosting the expansion phase of a quarterly cycle, engaging the wider community, and fostering unity. Junior youth groups actively participated, further integrating the festivals into neighbourhood activities.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic in the past few years, the recent sub-regional and regional (in the South Island) Summer Schools showcased joy, vibrancy, and collaborative efforts among regional and local institutions, marking a significant step forward in collaborative learnings between clusters. These summer schools were markers of many key developing characteristics.

## 180 B.E. cluster status at a glance



### Te Ika a Maui, North Island (17 Clusters) Focus on learning: how to move past the 3rd milestone

Ruapehu  
Waitomo/Ōtorohanga

Eastern Bay of Plenty  
Far North  
Rotorua  
South Waikato/Taupō  
(Passed the 2nd milestone in April 2023)  
Tairāwhiti  
(Passed the 2nd Milestone in November 2022)  
Taranaki  
Tauranga/Western Bay of Plenty  
Thames Coromandel  
Triumph  
Waikato  
Wairarapa  
Wellington  
Whangārei/Kaipara

Auckland  
(At the frontiers of learning)  
Hawkes Bay  
(Passed the 3rd milestone in 179 B.E. and now consolidating its capacities)

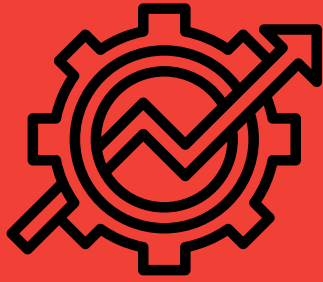
### Te Wai Pounamu, South Island (8 Clusters) All South Island clusters have the goal of passing the 3rd milestone by 2031 or sooner

Central Otago  
West Coast  
North Canterbury \*\*  
South Canterbury \*\*

\*\*More recently configured clusters which have yet to pass first milestone

Coastal Otago  
(Approaching 3rd milestone)  
Southland  
(Goal: Approach 3rd milestone by 2026)  
Te Tau Ihu  
(Goal: Approach 3rd milestone by 2026)

Central Canterbury  
(Goal: Strengthen its capacity as a third milestone cluster for the region)



## Learning from advanced Clusters



Auckland cluster reflection meeting, Browns Bay Bahá'í Centre, Feb 2024

Throughout the year, there has been a concerted effort at the national, regional, and cluster levels to leverage the strength of experienced communities to support those less advanced. Although previously Auckland stood as the only advanced cluster in Aotearoa that was able to offer support elsewhere, Hawke's Bay cluster has demonstrated its capacity to offer support in the development of some of its sister clusters, and contribute to learning.

To facilitate this process, various systems are being established for providing insights and sharing experiences in community-building endeavours. These include the attendance at specific meetings where learning can be disseminated, once each cycle, meetings with related institutions, exchange visits between core groups within clusters, and the use of media such as written and videographic narratives. Detailed information on these systems can be found in the report of the North Island Regional Council under "Dissemination of learning."

The Auckland cluster, as the most advanced in the North Island, has played a pivotal role in enriching learning across the region through initiatives like hosting individuals from various areas in its intensive neighbourhoods, and spearheading learning on the "groups of families" approach. The Manurewa neighbourhood, in particular, has continued to be at the frontiers of learning, sharing insights from its growth.

In the South Island, similar attention is being devoted to the process of cluster development. Central Canterbury has been actively working to become a reservoir of knowledge for the entire region, and Coastal Otago is also showing much promise in this regard.



The Auckland cluster-wide youth conference, held on 6-7 January 2024



In the Central Canterbury and Coastal Otago clusters, efforts are underway to grow capacity and deepen understanding of effective action. Institutional and agency members in these clusters are engaging in joint study sessions of Book 10 alongside Regional Bahá'í Council and Auxiliary Board members. These study sessions are synchronised with three-monthly cycles of activity, creating a rhythmic pulse of the programme of growth within the clusters.

In Central Canterbury, cluster agencies, Local Spiritual Assembly representatives, and regional institutional members, with the support of Auxiliary Board members, have established a regular practice of convening at least once per cycle. These gatherings are dedicated to analysing the cluster's reality and preparing for the cluster reflection meetings.

Additionally, both the Central Otago and Central Canterbury clusters are actively engaged in supporting and enhancing the capacity of neighbouring clusters. Through these collaborative efforts, a network of mutual support and growth is fostered, contributing to the unity of thought within the wider community.



Central Canterbury cluster host Our Story is One event



Families in Central Canterbury share 'Waffles and Prayers' in their homes regularly.



Gainsborough Pocket in Manurewa children's class programme. Two classes with 20 children attending weekly.



Gathering at the Bahá'í Centre in Manurewa, with visitors from Australia (Auxiliary Board member and secretary of the South Eastern Australia Institute Board, Nellie Samandari, Office of the Network of Learning Sites for Australasia Hayley Ala'i, and others), four members of the National Spiritual Assembly, and a cross section of the Auckland community and its institutions and agencies, who gathered to consult about the future development of the training institute in the Auckland cluster - 29 & 30 July 2023





Participants from Hawke's Bay, Tairāwhiti, Ōpōtiki and Palmerston North attend a junior youth camp hosted by the Assembly of Hastings

*“The significance of education in the work of community building is unmistakable, and in the field of social action the provision of education remains the signature contribution of Bahá’ís in most parts of the world.”*

— The Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021

### **Programme for the spiritual education of children (PSEC)**

The programme for the spiritual education of children in both the North and South Islands has shown significant progress in alignment with the broader vision outlined by the Universal House of Justice for the Nine Year Plan.

Efforts have been concentrated on formalising and integrating the programme seamlessly into a continuous educational process. This includes a focus on training new teachers and providing ongoing support as children progress through the grades. The impact of PSEC is being monitored by the Regional Institute Boards, with an emphasis on community building. The release of new educational materials, such as Unit two of Ruhi Book 12, has sparked deeper conversations within communities, contributing to the vibrancy and sustainability of the programme.

In the South Island, the programme has experienced significant growth and learning. Regular children's festivals have fostered community spirit and collaboration between clusters and neighbourhoods. There has been a shift towards viewing the programme as a comprehensive curriculum, with a focus on planning for progression through the grades. Teachers have actively engaged in outreach, involving more families and friends in the programme. A notable milestone includes the involvement of parents in teaching a Grade 4 class with diverse participation. Efforts are underway to deepen understanding and engagement through strategies like festivals and Whānau Days to build connections and conversations about the spiritual education of children.

### **Junior youth spiritual empowerment programme (JYSEP)**

The JYSEP has experienced substantial advancement in both regions, with a concerted effort to engage both smaller and larger groups of junior youth. Training sessions and camps have been instrumental in building capacity among animators and participants, leading to the graduation of several junior youth groups into the main sequence. In July 2023, a concerted effort was launched to expand the programme further, aiming to engage and sustain 300 junior youth in the Auckland cluster through ten texts and 50-100 junior youth in Hawke’s Bay, Tairāwhiti, and Wellington, with other clusters to follow.

Regional animator seminars have been instrumental in enhancing the effectiveness of animators, with a focus on increasing capacity and improving programme delivery. Additionally, the introduction of new materials, such as "Rays of Light," has enriched the programme’s content and furthered its goals.



End of year programme for the spiritual education of children celebration - Parnell, Auckland November 2023

## Main sequence of courses & institute capacity

In other highlights, the main sequence of courses has also progressed with the publication of revised Ruhi Books 6 and 7 in April 2023, completing the first cycle of publicly available courses. An in-depth study of Book 6, and “Anna’s presentation” during a nine-day orientation in Hawke’s Bay fostered deeper understanding and application of course content.

Efforts to enhance the capacity of the institute itself have been highlighted, emphasising the need for full-time individuals capable of guiding its evolution. Schemes of coordination are being strengthened to ensure effective collaboration across regions and clusters, with a focus on formalising roles and expectations for coordinators. The South Island Institute Board began the new year by participating in a gathering with other training institutes from Australia, New Zealand, and Timor-Leste in Sydney. They focused on studying guidance related to the Nine Year Plan and the role of the training institute. Collaboration between the North and South Island Institute Boards has continued through various initiatives this past year.



Christchurch friends starting Book 11, Unit 3

Following the successful launch of the Book 11 campaign in March 2023, which saw, in its initial phases, the engagement of 70 individuals in the northern region and over 30 participants in the southern region, a significant mobilisation effort ensued. Throughout the year, a number of clusters have been actively involved in its progression.

Notably, the Waikato cluster has witnessed a great uptake for the Book 11 campaign. This has resulted in the establishment of five to six study circles within the cluster, where members actively study the materials and share in vibrant discussions, while nurturing a collective spirit of learning and service.

In South Waikato/Taupō, a similar dedication to the campaign is evident, as community members actively contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen the campaign. The Whangārei/Kaipara cluster has also made significant strides in advancing the objectives of the Book 11 campaign, with enthusiastic participation observed in the 2023 national initiative. Nationally, the year-long Book 11 campaign has been a successful catalyst for the spiritual and intellectual growth of communities, fostering a deeper appreciation of the spiritual imperatives of contributing to the Funds of the Faith and making Huqúqu'lláh payments.



Youth from Manurewa study ‘Spirit of Faith’ at a camp



The New Plymouth Spiritual Assembly with some community members studying Book 11, May 2023



Completion of Book 11 Units 1 and 2 from the Waimakariri and Hurunui districts (North Canterbury cluster)





Race unity speech awards finalists 2023

*“The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is concerned with the transformation of both humanity’s inner life and social environment”*

– The Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021

A major theme of the Nine Year Plan is contributing to the transformation of the social environment, of which there are two key elements: practical social action initiatives arising naturally from the community building in an area, and active participation in discussions of importance to the society around us, illuminating these discourses with the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. Although much of these happen at the neighbourhood, local or cluster level, the national discourses require a more formal, national engagement. In Aotearoa, the Office of Public Affairs(OPA) is charged with taking the lead on behalf of the national Bahá’í community in engaging with prevalent discourses of society at the national level. The Regional Councils have taken a lead in initiating dialogues aimed at nurturing vibrant communities, as well as leveraging the resources of the training institute to enhance community development. The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) also plays a crucial role in building the capacity of tertiary students to contribute to social transformation. ISGP integrates principles of service and social responsibility into higher education experiences. Students are empowered to reflect deeply on their actions aimed at bettering the world and taking ownership of their educational journey during their formative university years to be agents of positive change.

## Contributing to public discourse

In the past year, the OPA has continued to play an important role in the national discourse on race relations, with its continued facilitation of the Race Unity Speech Awards and the associated youth empowerment initiative of the Race Unity Hui.

The Race Unity Hui, held in collaboration with the Office of the Children’s Commissioner, provided a platform for dialogue among youth and adults, fostering

understanding and collaboration across generations. Additionally, efforts to support youth engagement on national initiatives like the National Action Plan Against Racism have further amplified the voices of young people in critical discussions on social cohesion and inclusion.

The Race Unity Speech Awards (RUSA) also continue to provide a significant avenue for advancing conversations on race unity and ethnic diversity. This event fosters meaningful dialogue and cultivates enduring relationships with government bodies, civil society organisations, and the media. In particular, this initiative has allowed the Office of Public Affairs to amplify its presence both online and on social media platforms, thereby extending the reach of its message to celebrate excellence and to foster understanding and unity among diverse communities.

## Engagement with the media

While media relations have not been the primary focus for the OPA this year, the Office has actively engaged with journalists and media professionals to amplify Bahá’í initiatives and advocacy efforts in a systematic way. Strategic initiatives such as the Race Unity Speech Awards have provided valuable opportunities to build relations with the media, while individual connections and collaborations with Bahá’ís working in the media have facilitated coverage of key events and campaigns. By leveraging media platforms, the Bahá’í community has sought to raise awareness of pressing issues and promote dialogue and understanding within society.



Attendees of the Taranaki Race Unity Hui take part in discussions



A national commemoration event held in Christchurch on 18 June 2023 in honour of 10 Bahá'í women who were martyred in Shiraz, Iran, forty years ago.

## Building relations with Government and civil society

The OPA has prioritised building relations with members of parliament and civil society organisations to enhance the Bahá'í community's presence on the national stage and promote social progress. In November 2023, Local Spiritual Assemblies were encouraged to arrange meetings with members of parliament, following an approach based on learning from past experiences. These efforts aim to foster understanding and collaboration between the Bahá'í community and governmental representatives, contributing to the broader discourse on social progress.

Initiatives such as online learning spaces and engagement with interfaith councils have facilitated dialogue and collaboration, while partnerships with organisations like the New Zealand Religious Diversity Centre and the Inclusive Aotearoa Collective have broadened the scope of engagement to address issues of race relations, religious freedom, and social inclusion. Throughout the year, members of the OPA and Bahá'í individuals have also participated in several national spaces (all noted in the OPA report) to build relationships and contribute to discourse. Through these efforts, the Bahá'í community has sought to contribute meaningfully to discussions on social progress in Aotearoa.

## Defending the Bahá'í community in Iran from persecution

The "Our Story Is One" campaign, launched in response to intensified persecution in Iran, has raised awareness of the plight of Bahá'ís in that country and garnered widespread support both domestically and internationally.

180 B.E. saw many public events such as a national commemorative memorial 'Our Story is One' event held in Christchurch in June 2023 and art exhibitions, media coverage, and advocacy efforts, all of which have highlighted the sacrifices made by Bahá'ís for gender equality and justice, fostering greater empathy and solidarity within and beyond the Bahá'í community.

Recognising the importance of addressing human rights violations while avoiding further endangering the Bahá'í community in Iran, this worldwide campaign strategically connected the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran with broader issues of human rights and social justice in that country, and indeed in the world as a whole.



The above flyer was created by the Far North community for a planned special afternoon hui on 18 June 2023, at the Bahá'í Centre in Kerikeri, as part of the 'Our Story is One' Campaign





NSA retreat 22-24 Sept 2023, (with Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í caretaker)

*“Today, at the beginning of the second century of the Formative Age, the shape of Bahá'í administration has developed considerably, and its continued development will be essential for the release of the society-building power of the Faith.”*

– Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021

The National Spiritual Assembly continues to work on strengthening its administration through collaborative efforts, capacity building, working to raise the effectiveness of its communication, and the flow of information and guidance, and fostering unity, spiritual health and progress within the Bahá'í community. Throughout the year, the National Assembly has maintained close collaboration with the Institution of the Counsellors and expresses gratitude for the wise counsel and loving engagement it has had from various members of the Board of Counsellors during the year.

Joint formal meetings between the National Assembly and our beloved liaison Counsellor, Ms Tessa Scrine, were frequent during 180 B.E., as well as many informal consultations between her and the National Secretary.

Noteworthy were joint retreats which opened spaces for consultations focusing on important topics such as human resource development, in which the National Assembly spent three full days with Ms. Scrine and her fellow Counsellor Dr. Vahid Saberi, who provided valuable insights that were greatly appreciated by the National Assembly.

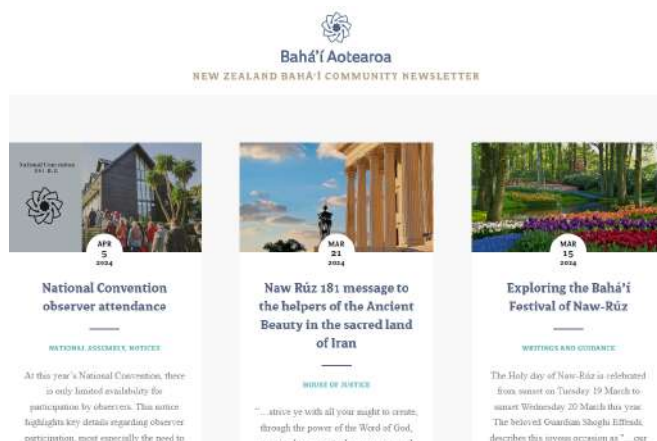
The National Assembly also extends its appreciation to various agencies and individuals, including Regional Bahá'í Councils and Regional Institute Boards, for their dedicated service to the Faith. Recognising their sacrificial efforts, the National Assembly acknowledges their role in fostering the growth and progress of the Cause. The creation of new roles, such as the National Health and Safety Coordinator, reflects its commitment to enhancing coordination and processes.

Effective communication remains a priority for the National Assembly, utilising channels like letters, emails, videos and the Mailchimp platform to share information and advice with Local Spiritual Assemblies and believers. Special emphasis is placed on key messaging, with prompt sharing of messages from the Universal House of Justice. Special publications and informative videos are also used to further deepen understanding and engagement within the community.

The national online newsletter, Bahá'í Aotearoa, continues to be a primary vehicle for sharing news and information, and believers are urged to subscribe if they do not already receive the notifications of new material each time an item is uploaded. Bahá'í Aotearoa serves as a vital communication tool, providing regular updates and quarterly digests to believers.

Statistical analysis plays a crucial role in assessing cluster growth and national trends, and most particularly for those at the cluster level to utilise statistics in their planning processes.

Reporting of community-building activities to the Bahá'í World Centre on a bi-annual basis is an undertaking of the National Secretariat, of which the National Statistics Officer is a part.



National Newsletter Website: Bahá'í Aotearoa





South Island Regional Summer School, Christchurch, January 2024

The institution of Summer School continues to evolve and develop. Fostering the intellectual life of the community, and its coherence with teaching activities is always being examined and improved. Regional Councils played a significant role in organising these events, integrating themes aligned with Bahá'u'lláh's vision as set by the National Assembly, fostering a community spirit and diverse learning experiences. These efforts reflect the evolving vision of the National Assembly for summer schools as spaces to foster wholehearted participation in the Cause.

The 180 B.E. unit conventions were 24 in number with 57 delegates elected for the National Convention, the same number of delegates that New Zealand has had for many decades. The National Spiritual Assembly shared a video message to all believers, urging them to reflect on the recently released 28 November 2023 Message from the Supreme Body.

The National Convention for 180 B.E. held at Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í in late May 2023 marked a significant return to the historic Bahá'í property in Henderson Valley. Counsellor Latai 'Atoa represented the Continental Board of Counsellors. Insights from the International Convention and regional presentations enriched discussions, with Counsellor Latai 'Atoa expressing delight at the Convention's uplifting atmosphere. All 57 elected delegates participated in voting, resulting in 513 valid votes. Mrs. Audrey Aumua replaced retiring member Mr. Sione Tu'itahi, who was honoured for his 15 years of service as a member of the National ASpiritual Assembly. The National Assembly expressed gratitude to Sione and his family, while the officers remained unchanged from the previous year.

In other notable changes, the month of June 2023 saw bahai.org.nz email addresses transition to the Microsoft platform, with the National Office offering support and training while the National Convention website moved to Wordpress for 181 B.E., with appreciation extended to Mr. Babak Ivoghlian for ongoing IT support. An IT Advisory Board was established in August 2023, with goals of enhancing technology services for the national community, focusing on assessing current technology, addressing future needs, and developing an IT management framework.

The programme "Fostering the Spiritual Health of a Local Bahá'í Community" was revised and set for implementation after the Ridván elections for the benefit of the community. The "Safeguarding the Interests of Young People" training course continues to be used widely, and a new branch course has been developed to serve as the refresher course between the four-yearly full accreditation process.



Delegates are welcomed to the 67th National Convention, 180 B.E.





## Pioneering

### National pioneering endeavours

The Aotearoa Pioneering Taskforce remains dedicated to advancing pioneer goals, emphasising both the importance of pioneering and the need for deputisation funds to be contributed by believers to assist with this endeavour. Establishing a process for selecting and deploying pioneers has been challenging this year, with a small but steady interest observed, particularly among those who have previous pioneering experience.

Insights from global experiences have guided the identification of potential pioneers, highlighting the importance for prospective pioneers to either have, or gain experience before being deployed, in supporting others to build their capacities. Balancing the willingness of capable friends to pioneer with their departure impacting their home communities has been a challenge, alongside issues such as visas and health considerations, though this has been a valuable learning experience for the task force.

Despite challenges, two of New Zealand's initial international goals were achieved during 180 B.E. (French Polynesia and Cook Islands), with additional short-term service offered for a third goal (Czech Republic, city of Brno). Efforts to build capacity for pioneering have extended beyond the third milestone cluster of Auckland.

On the homefront, two families from Auckland have successfully settled in Invercargill, allowing for focus on other goal areas in the South Island. Urgent attention is needed for the goals in Ōpōtiki and Rotorua, with temporary support being provided until permanent pioneers are identified. Expressions of interest have been received from several individuals and families, though immediate deployment is not anticipated.

The following articles on Pioneering have been shared via Bahá'í Aotearoa in 180 B.E.

- *Decision to Pioneer brings joyful surprises: Part 1 - 31 Mar 2023, Part 2 - 4 Aug 2023*
- *The start of a Pioneering Journey - 6 Oct 2023*



Danasha & Ella Taufalele - Pioneers to the Cook Islands



New Zealand pioneers with Friends at a Bahá'í gathering in the Cook Islands



A member of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Pioneering Taskforce meet with pioneers to French Polynesia on their departure from Aotearoa - Yvonne Williamson & Michael Vaughan

## Other notable developments

These accounts expand on some specific areas of development that are not fully covered elsewhere

### Message of gratitude expressed to the Universal House of Justice

In July 2023, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote to the Universal House of Justice as follows:

*“Beloved Supreme Institution,  
The National Spiritual Assembly was uplifted to receive such a beautiful message from our beloved Supreme Institution, and we have no doubt that all of the friends throughout Aotearoa are currently feeling spiritually enriched to learn that the hearts of that Divine Body were gladdened by what took place at our National Convention and by what friends in many parts of Aotearoa are undertaking in service to Bahá'u'lláh. “We were moved to read that the House of Justice recognises that the community of the Greatest Name in Aotearoa is learning about the strength and beauty that comes from embracing diversity and fostering an inclusive environment that values and celebrates the contributions of all individuals. “The youth and groups of families in many parts of the country who are taking charge of their own spiritual, social, and material progress will be energised by the message of the House of Justice which specifically acknowledges this. In sharing your most encouraging message, we have urged all the friends to arise and continue widening their circles of unity, thus enabling these endeavours to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures, and to strive, in that way, to bring further joy to the hearts of the Supreme Institution. “We are deeply stirred and feel sure that institutions, agencies, communities and individuals everywhere in our country will feel similarly, to know that our beloved Universal House of Justice will supplicate in the Holy Shrines that, as the friends “arise with unrestrained fervour” to add their efforts towards releasing the society-building power of the Faith, these endeavours “may be reinforced by the Company on high” because of the loving and supportive entreaties of the Supreme Body at the Holy Threshold. “With deepest gratitude and love,  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand”*

### Aotearoa assists New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands

Each year, the National Spiritual Assembly sets aside the annual amount it has pledged to the Universal House of Justice to assist sister communities in various parts of the world as part of a scheme of international financial collaboration. During 180 B.E. the Universal House of Justice requested New Zealand to assist the National Spiritual Assembly of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands with the purchase of equipment and

furniture for their national office, which was implemented with joyful hearts on behalf of all of the believers of Aotearoa.



Aerial view of the coast of New Caledonia

### Changes adopted for the Assembly By-Laws and Declaration of Trust

In consultation with the Universal House of Justice, and after seeking legal advice, changes were formally adopted by the National Assembly for the National and Local Assembly By-Laws and Declaration of Trust. The Bahá'í Community of New Zealand is registered with Charities Services (CC42972). The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand is the ‘parent’ entity of the group in which Local Spiritual Assemblies are members. The By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly can only be amended by the National Spiritual Assembly, pursuant to Article XIV of the By-Laws:

*Article XIV*

*These By Laws may be amended only by majority action of the National Spiritual Assembly which in making amendments, does so for the By-Laws of all local Spiritual Assemblies throughout New Zealand.*

Changes were largely made to accommodate certain compliance factors and also those in relation to the two-stage election which at present only applies to Auckland but which will in future apply to all Local Spiritual Assemblies.

For those Local Spiritual Assemblies that are incorporated, the National Secretariat first advised the Companies Office of the rules change and upon receipt of confirmation from the Companies Office that the amended By-Laws were approved, the revised By-Laws are in the process of being uploaded to Charities Services.



## Summer School approach changed

As you will read elsewhere in this report, the approach to the summer schools changed in 181 B.E. The National Spiritual Assembly recognised that many friends had missed the energy, vibrancy and connections that came with the larger regional summer school gatherings. However, some friends found the large North Island summer school that had taken place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic too overwhelming in size. Many families were grateful for having an annual opportunity to reconnect with other families with children of similar ages from wider afield. The National Assembly listened to the feedback of the friends about the decentralised summer schools. Although these had been necessary during the earlier years of the pandemic, the friends had expressed concerns about continuing in that mode. As a result, the National Assembly engaged in extensive consultations with a wide range of institutions and agencies to explore how to balance the desire of many of the friends to gather in larger groups with having summer schools closer to the grassroots where many more people can potentially participate. The concept that prevailed is for summer schools to be as decentralised as possible, but in a way that ensures an optimal number of participants and a robust organisational system that creates a vibrant experience for everyone, especially children, junior youth and youth. Friends were generally a lot happier with this year's approach.



Friends gather at the Kura Raumati - Pāpāwai marae, Greytown, Wairarapa. December 2023

## Institute for studies in global prosperity

The National Spiritual Assembly has been delighted with the dedicated service and the depth of insights that the coordination team for ISGP brings to their service. There is a wonderful cohort of facilitators in New Zealand who serve at the undergraduate seminars held each year in Aotearoa, and they and the team are learning to manage the increasing complexity that can come from the diversity of participants, setting high standards for the seminars and developing a focus and methodology around the learning process, such as how the facilitators are helping the youth, and how the programme is supporting and reinforcing their Bahá'í identity. The seminars continue to grow in strength and we feel very grateful that such a beautiful, well organised space exists for our young people, thanks to the conscientious and assiduous efforts of all those involved.

## Our Story is One campaign

The National Assembly commends the Office of Public Affairs for encouraging, supporting and coordinating those communities and friends who contributed to this international campaign. Several of the contributions from Aotearoa were mentioned in the highlights shared internationally by the Bahá'í International Community, and there was much that could not be included. The momentum of the campaign continued through the year and culminated at the end of the year with the art exhibition in Auckland. The 'Our Story Is One' interconnectedness and shared aspirations, which have resonated in New Zealand and around the world were very evident as the campaign unfolded in Aotearoa. The Office of Public Affairs commented that "One of the strengths of the first phase of the campaign in New Zealand was the initiative, dedication and resourcefulness shown by those who organised memorial events. The creativity and talents of the Bahá'ís who contributed at short notice was remarkable [with] beautiful creations of our musicians, poets and artists." The initiative helped to facilitate conversations and collaboration between Bahá'ís and like-minded individuals and organisations calling for gender equality and human rights for all.



Promotional flyer for the Our Story is Once Campaign

## 70th anniversary of New Zealand pioneers opening the Solomon Islands to the Faith

On 15 March 2024, letters of congratulations were sent to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Solomon Islands and to Lady Keithie and Sir Bruce Saunders, extending heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Bahá'ís of Aotearoa on the Faith's 70th anniversary in that country.

Keithie (then a child) and her parents, Alvin and Gertrude Blum, set out from their home in Auckland, New Zealand, in the time of the beloved Guardian during the Ten Year Crusade, and took the Faith to the Solomon Islands. They were bestowed by the Guardian with the designation "Knights of Bahá'u'lláh" for this service. The dedication and commitment that the Blum family made to their adopted homeland is truly admirable. Keithie and her husband, Bruce Saunders, continued the legacy of her parents, and in more recent years, Sir Bruce was knighted for services to the Solomons.

The formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Honiara, shortly after the Blum family's arrival there in 1954, speaks volumes of the tireless efforts made by the family. "Of Wars and Worship: The Extraordinary Story of Gertrude and Alvin Blum", written by their daughter, Keithie, has been an inspirational and insightful read. We are in the process of sourcing further copies to ensure that our Bahá'í Distribution Service continues to stock this beautiful book at all times to honour this legacy.



Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Gertrude Blum is welcomed on the Tangata Marae in Matamata for the North Island Summer School - 1990.

## Expression of love and sympathy for devastation from fires in Maui, Hawaii

With heavy hearts and a profound sense of unity, love, and support, the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand extended its deepest condolences and prayers to the Hawaiian Bahá'í community, and the people of Hawaii in the wake of the devastating fires that swept through the Island of Maui.

The loss of lives and the destruction of the historic town of Lahaina and the cherished Baldwin House Museum left a void and the sincere hopes of the friends in Aotearoa were for relief efforts to reach those friends and communities affected by the disaster and that they received the aid and assistance they urgently needed to recover from the damage and distress. The National Assembly prayed that the Blessed Beauty would reinforce the friends in Hawaii with bounties from the Divine Kingdom that would enable them to triumph over adversity, and that the light of the Faith would shine brighter as a result of their spiritual fortitude and resilience.

## National Assembly participation at the 13th International Convention

All nine members of the New Zealand National Spiritual Assembly were able to travel to Israel in April 2023, and participate fully as delegates in the International Bahá'í Convention. All stayed together in the Dan Panorama Hotel, where the members of the Australasian Continental Board of Counsellors also stayed, along with many other National Assemblies and Counsellors. This gave many wonderful opportunities for informal engagement with believers from around the world, as did the times spent in travelling to visit various holy places during the days leading up to the Convention and during the break periods of the Convention itself. It was a blessed time, and many prayers were offered in the Holy Shrines and in the holy precincts of the Qiblah for the believers in Aotearoa and all the endeavours being undertaken with love and devotion. As these prayers were offered, the National Assembly members had profound thoughts of gratitude and love for all of the wonderful service being given by the institutions and agencies throughout our country, and the individuals who comprise them and who so often demonstrate consecration and sacrifice. Every individual believer on our membership list in New Zealand was also specifically mentioned by name in the Haram-i-Aqdas.

## Passing in New Zealand of notable Pasifika believers

The National Spiritual Assembly of Samoa sent a message upon the passing in Auckland of a long-standing member of the New Zealand Bahá'í community, paying tribute to the distinguished service he gave to Samoa in his earlier years:

*“We mourn the loss of an extraordinary figure who leaves behind a distinguished legacy of unquestioned loyalty to the Cause of God. Afioga Lavea Lemalu Tupuola Sione Malifa was one of the members of the first National Spiritual Assembly of Samoa elected in 1970. He continued to serve in that capacity for seventeen non-consecutive years. He combined immense personal warmth and serene self-effacement with utter consecration, unwavering obedience and vigilance in the protection of his beloved Faith. His frank and loving counsels with a cheerful sense of humour will be missed by all. His steadfastness in the Cause of his Lord and his valiant spirit and radiant enthusiasm to represent his beloved Faith in various discourses will be fondly remembered as it left a legacy that will be felt for generations.”*

The New Zealand Bahá'í community was privileged to have had Tupuola Sione Malifa in our midst these past few years and the Bahá'í friends of Aotearoa will miss his inspiration, and humble, unassuming support.

Simione Koto, a dedicated and much-loved servant of the Blessed Beauty, and serving member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Fiji Islands, passed away in Wellington. His services to the Cause of God are warmly remembered, and the National Spiritual Assembly of Fiji paid the following tribute to him:

*“A staunch Bahá'í, Simi offered years of service to the beloved Cause and was dearly loved by the community. He upheld qualities of humility and staunch steadfastness to the Covenant, showing obedience to the guidance of the Universal House of Justice including in relation to the consumption of kava, doing away with it altogether and setting an elevated example to others. Simi's generous and warm spirit selflessly giving of his time, love, material means, encouragement and accompaniment in the field of service supported friends young and old in their service and connection to the Cause. He supported the work of translation, served on the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Lautoka, Nasinu and Navua, on an Area Teaching Committee, the National Teaching Committee, as the National Statistics Officer and member of the Working Group for Fiji. Simi served on the National Pioneering Committee and ultimately himself together with his wife and children home-front pioneered to a goal cluster that consequently reached the second milestone within the last Five Year Plan. Simi served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Fiji Islands from 2017, including as its*

*chairperson. By God's Mercy, Simi's health improved in time for him to attend the Thirteenth International Bahá'í Convention [April/May 2023] and fulfil his sacred obligation as a delegate in person.”*

In a message to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Fiji Islands, the New Zealand National Assembly wrote:

*“With deepest sadness at the news of the passing of Mr Simione Koto, we send our loving sympathies to your institution for the loss of a much-loved brother, to the Bahá'í community of Fiji for the loss of one of its esteemed and stalwart servants, and most importantly to Mr Koto's loved ones ... for the loss of someone so dear to your hearts. Although all efforts were valiantly made to restore dear Simi to full physical health, it seems the Divine Purpose had other plans for him. We know how devotedly he was serving in a variety of ways, with radiance and joy, but his illustrious spirit was needed for a greater purpose in a higher Realm. The New Zealand Bahá'í community is blessed with having Simi's burial in our land...”*

Mrs Latai Mailau, a steadfast Tongan believer who had lived in New Zealand for well over forty years and was well known in the greater Wellington region, passed away at the age of 82. She had been one of the first youth to accept the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in Tonga in the early 1960s and accompanied many young people to remain strong in the Faith. Her faithfulness to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh in Tonga and here over many decades in Aotearoa, and her unconditional love for all, expressed in material and moral support, have been an inspiration for many of the Pasifika friends. Latai has been described as a truly beautiful Bahá'í in every sense, and many remember her with love and fondness. Her parents were among the first to accept the Faith in Tonga. Her father, the late Lisiate Maka Fifita, served on the National Spiritual Assembly of Tonga for many years before he was called to serve as an Auxiliary Board member and then later as Counsellor. He was one of the tellers of the first election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, and he supported and encouraged many young Bahá'ís.

Former Cook Island pioneers now living in Whangārei organised a memorial service for Mrs. Ngametua Makirere, a stalwart Cook Island believer who passed away the previous year in Australia in November 2023. Believers throughout Aotearoa who served in the Cook Islands at various times were invited to this remembrance occasion in Whangārei, of someone dear to the hearts of many.



## Bahá'í representation at Faith Leaders' Forums

The National Secretary has represented the Bahá'í community at three Faith Leaders' Forums, all held in Auckland between September 2023 and February 2024, two of which were organised by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities (MEC): the inaugural MEC Faith Leaders Forum was held on 06 September 2023 and the second on 23 February 2024. When sending the invitation to the second forum, the Ministry wrote: "The positive impact of our collective efforts was evident during our previous meeting, where faith leaders played a crucial role in supporting communities, particularly during the middle east crises. Building on this we recognise the need to continue fostering an environment of collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability. The Ministry acknowledges the vital role that faith leaders play in addressing challenges within our diverse society. Your insights and contributions are invaluable, and we believe that a sustained platform for collaboration can further strengthen the network of faith leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand. This second Faith Leaders Forum aims to deepen the dialogue established during our initial meeting. We seek to create a space where both sides actively assume responsibilities and contribute their strengths to collectively address systemic issues, share insights, and learn from each other's experiences."

The annual Religious Leaders' Forum organised by the New Zealand Religious Diversity Centre (RDC) was the third gathering of religious leaders from around the country during 180 B.E., held in December 2023, where the National Secretary was also accompanied by a coordinator of the Office of Public Affairs, Paddy Payne. Paddy and the National Secretary have attended these annual forums since they were instigated some eight years ago by the RDC.

## National Assembly connection to ISGP under-graduate seminar

The team organising the annual undergraduate seminar for the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) is commended for another stimulating seminar for Bahá'í university students. This year, for the first time, the seminar was held on the Bahá'í premises at Te Whare Akoranga in Henderson Valley from 3 to 13 February 2024. As usual, the ISGP team lovingly extended an invitation for members of the National Assembly to join the closing session and two members of the National Assembly were able to be present to witness the impact that the seminar had on the participants. Also, a few members of the National Assembly connected to the seminar in different ways this year which has been very special: the organisers invited one member to attend the opening session, as he had been part of the learning about ISGP seminars

over the years and they were keen for him to remain connected; and the whole ISGP group visited the Fred Hollows Foundation for their field trip where the CEO of the foundation, who is a member of the National Assembly, hosted and engaged in stimulating conversation with them. We were told by the organisers that "The participants were very much inspired by the visit and learned a great deal that connects with the concepts they have been discussing during the seminar so far."



## Bahá'í representation on New Zealand Religious Diversity Trust Board (RDC)

For the past four years, Marc Rivers has served as the Bahá'í representative on this Trust. He relinquished this service just prior to the end of 180 B.E. in readiness for his departure to serve as the Chief Financial Officer of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland on 1 April 2024, and at present with the future of the RDC uncertain, a replacement Bahá'í representative has not been determined.

## Message to retiring Minister of the Crown

In a message to Hon Nanaia Mahuta, retiring Minister for Foreign Affairs, in late 2023, the National Assembly stated: *"We express our deep appreciation for your exemplary service to New Zealand as the longest serving Māori woman Member of Parliament and the first woman Minister of Foreign Affairs. We acknowledge the strength, courage and knowledge you demonstrated in breaking new ground for wāhine Māori and women generally, and the strategic approach you took to critical issues. We are sincerely grateful for your willingness to speak up for oppressed peoples whose human rights are violated, including the Bahá'í religious minority in Iran."*



Hon Nanaia Mahuta

## Official opening of Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í

At the recently inaugurated Bahá'í Centre for Learning, Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í, an open day event on 17 December 2023 saw friends and guests gathering in unity and joy. The occasion honoured the dedication of individuals who have served at the Hyde Dunn property over the years. The event began with a traditional karanga followed by songs and prayers in Te Reo, performed by Bahá'í youth. Vahid Qualls, representing the National Spiritual Assembly, acknowledged the service of many and spoke about the property's history and significance. After a closing prayer, attendees enjoyed afternoon tea and explored the newly developed centre, fostering conversation and celebration.



Official opening event of Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í, November 2023

## Invercargill Spiritual Assembly celebrated its 50th anniversary

The National Spiritual Assembly sent loving congratulations and best wishes to the Invercargill community for the Ridván celebrations in 2023, which marked the 50th anniversary of the formation of that Spiritual Assembly. As foundational institutions in the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, all Local

Assemblies guide and shepherd their communities, as a beacon of light glowing with promise for the future maturation of these institutions into Local Houses of Justice. Through the vicissitudes that these embryonic institutions inevitably face, they steadily build capacity to overcome impediments to their functioning and will continue on this trajectory as their members serve with dedication and as their community supports, respects and cherishes this precious gem.

“Bahá'í institutions are not conceived only as a means of administering the internal aspects of Bahá'í community life, essential though this is. Foremost, the Administrative Order is intended to serve as a channel through which the spirit of the Faith is to flow, embodying in its operation the kind of relationships that must come to bind together and sustain society as humanity moves towards collective maturity.”

(Bahai.org website)

## Recognition in the wider community

The National Assembly sent letters of acknowledgment to the following:

Deb Gilbertson, a member of the Hutt City Bahá'í community, who has been appointed as a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the King's Birthday Honours. The National Spiritual Assembly expressed its wholehearted congratulations on her being made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the King's Birthday and Coronation Honours List 2023.

*"It brings great gladness to the National Assembly to see a member of the Bahá'í community being honoured for services to society. Your exemplary contributions in the business, science and technology fields, over many years, have shown what is possible through constant persistence and dedication."*

Dr Jane Ta'afaki, a dedicated researcher and member of the Bahá'í community of Waitaki, achieved a monumental milestone with the completion of her doctoral thesis on Tuvaluan health and ola lei (well-being). Her work not only contributes to academia but also holds profound implications for the wider community, aligning perfectly with the core values of Bahá'í principles.

Dr Veronica Tawhai, who has been appointed as Fellow in Academy for Māori research and Scholarship – Te Mata o te Tau. A member of the Bahá'í community of Palmerston North, her contributions through research have exemplified the Bahá'í ideals of striving for excellence and service to humanity, and in particular, her contributions to the field of indigenous scholarship have earned her well-deserved recognition.





# Financial Report

## He Pūrongo Pūtea

### Material means

We all know that only Bahá'ís can voluntarily contribute to the Funds of the Faith, and no contributions to the Bahá'í Funds from anyone who isn't a Bahá'í are accepted, making this an exclusive privilege of the Bahá'ís, an entirely spiritual act, motivated solely by generosity and gratitude. It is more than a monetary act, so even in financially difficult times, all “should contribute to the extent possible, however modest their offering may be. God doth not burden a soul beyond its capacity ... Be ye assured that in place of these contributions, your agriculture, your industry, and your commerce will be blessed by manifold increases, with goodly gifts and bestowals. He who cometh with one goodly deed will receive a tenfold reward...”

The concept of universal participation in giving to the Fund and sincerity of motive in doing so are principal characteristics of drawing down blessings, so the act of giving – each one according to their capacity – and with purity of heart and intention, is a key message that the National Assembly is eager for all friends to take to heart. We feel sure that it is the spiritual attitudes of the believers who in a spirit of generosity and sacrifice give of their means to assist the building of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order, who open the channels for divine confirmations to flow to our community.

*“We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good – this is the secret of right living.”*

*Shoghi Effendi*

For God is the Sustainer, the Helper, the Generous, the Bountiful, and the Ever-Bestowing. By contributing to the Bahá'í Funds, we align our financial decisions with our spiritual values; we participate in a united global mission of unity and peace-building; and we experience the contentment that comes from selfless sacrifice. It is a transformative process. Whatever we have is a trust from God, and freely sharing it through the Bahá'í Funds is an act of devotion to God as well as a service to humanity. It is a sacred act.

*“We hope to have impressed upon you, in these pages, that the present-day capacity of the Bahá'í community, combined with the discipline it has achieved through adherence to a coherent framework for action, has prepared it for an extensive, rigorous test of all its*

*resources, spiritual as well as material. The Plan that will shortly commence—the first major undertaking in a sacred twenty-five-year venture, generational in its scope and significance—will make demands of the individual believer, the community, and the institutions reminiscent of the demands that the Guardian made of the Bahá'í world at the outset of the Ten Year Crusade. If, by the grace of Almighty God, the friends should succeed in reaching the heights of heroism to which they are now summoned, history will assuredly pay tribute to their actions in terms no less glowing than those with which it honours the glorious deeds that decorate the annals of the first century of the Formative Age.”*

*The Universal House of Justice*

*30 December 2021 Letter to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors*

### Reflections on the development of the National Fund

Contributions to all National, International and Continental funds (including special earmarked funds) decreased 31%. The number of individuals making direct contributions to the National Fund however stayed similar to last year. Contributions to the National Fund excluding special earmarked funds increased 4% while other income increased 16%. Operating expenses increased 12% driven by expansion and consolidation activities as well as property and international pioneering support. As a result, the National Fund realised an operating deficit of \$122 thousand. Key highlights and learnings include:

- Contributions to the National Fund increased 4% after having declined 18% last year.
- Total contributions declined 31% after two years of large contributions for Te Whare Akoranga which became operational during the year.
- The rate of direct participation in the National Fund stayed similar to last year after having doubled from years prior.
- More than NZD 119,000 was contributed towards repayment of the NZD 1.6 million loan from the Universal House of Justice
- A deficit of \$122 thousand was generated for total national operations including agencies and committees.
- Capacity increased at the regional and cluster level in treasury processes through a growing group of collaborators.

- Monthly calls with local, regional and national treasurers established as a means to improve communication, mutual support and collective awareness of the needs
- Ongoing biweekly calls between regional treasurers and the National Treasurer to reflect, improve administrative processes and provide mutual support
- Further improvements in auditing processes were achieved ensuring compliance with Charities Services requirements
- More experience was gained with the application of the remuneration policy in various circumstances

## Financial analysis based on draft financial statements<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

There has been a 4% increase in contributions to the National Fund for the year to \$1.088 million while other income increased 16% to NZD 377,506 for a total income excluding earmarked contributions of NZD 1,465 million (+7%). Operating expenses increased by 12% resulting in a net deficit this year of NZD 122 thousand.

As reserves were used towards the construction of Te Whare Akoranga and the purchase of land adjacent to the future temple site, it is important that surpluses are generated in future years to repay the loan to the Universal House of Justice and to replenish reserves for future projects.

### Contributions

Total contributions to all national and external funds including special earmarked contributions decreased 31% to NZD 1,526 million after an historic high last year of \$2.2 million. Contributions to the National Fund for the year increased 4% to \$1.088 million up from \$1.05 million last year, however special earmarked contributions declined to \$0.2 million from over \$0.8 million last year.

Contributions to the International Fund declined by 38% while contributions to the Continental Fund declined by 7%. Special earmarked funds (primarily towards the establishment of a Baha'i property in the South Island as well as for repayment of the loan to the Universal House of Justice for the construction of Te Whare Akoranga training facility) was \$224,944.

Once again the community contributed generously to the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Baha albeit down on last year (\$87 thousand this year and \$126 thousand last year).

Contributions to the Fund were more evenly spread throughout the year with 15% of contributions arriving in the last month compared to 16% last year. This is better than the pattern several years ago when 30% of contributions arrived in the last month. A pattern of more regular giving throughout the year is important and allows for improved planning for expansion and consolidation activities.

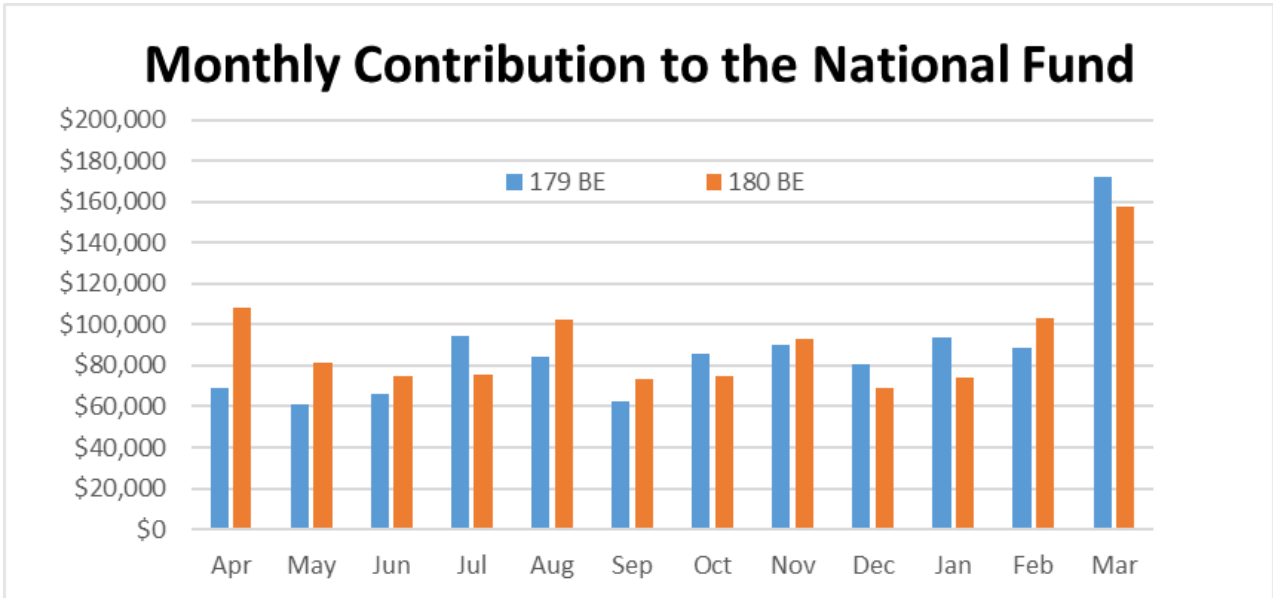
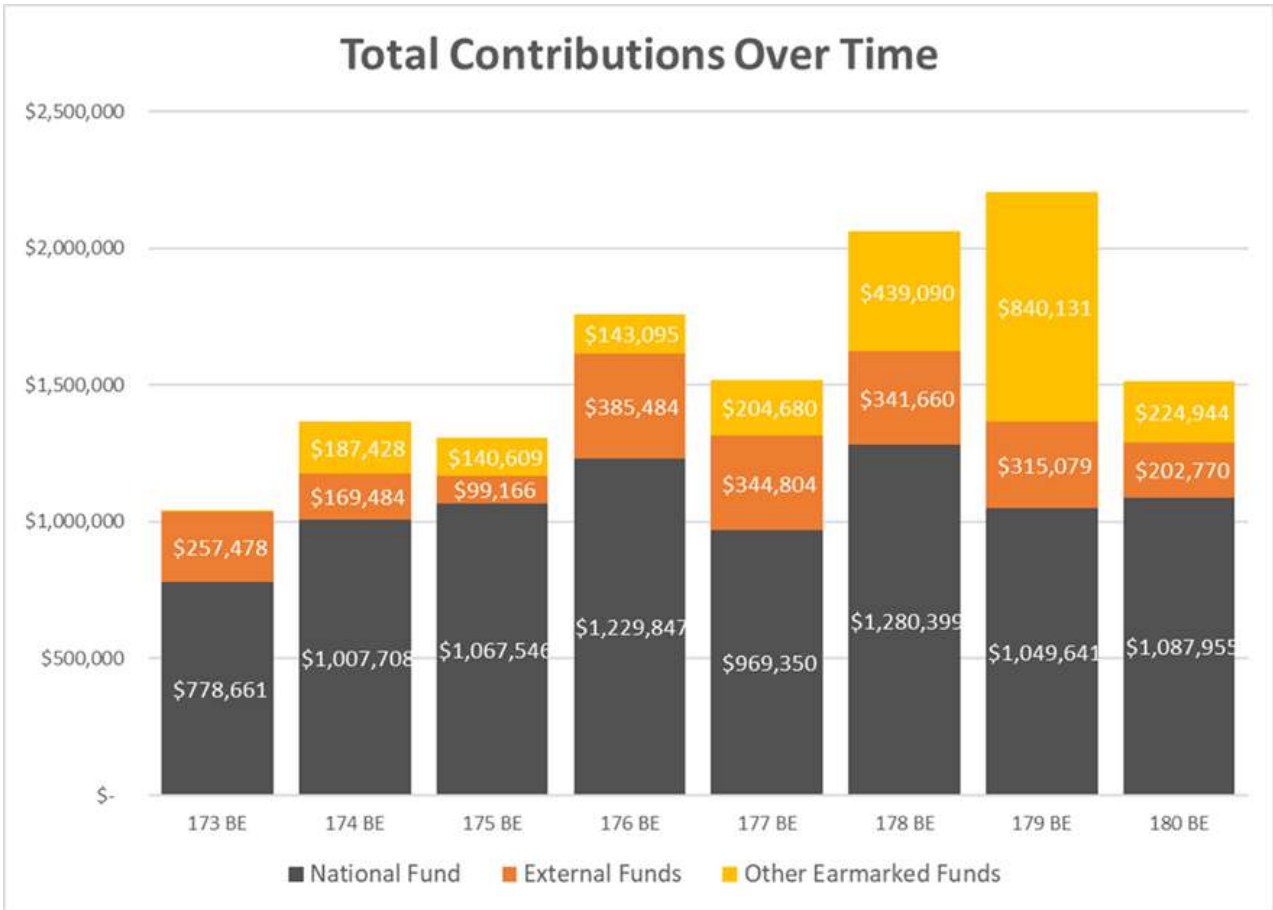
Direct participation in the National Fund by individuals was similar to last year with 68% of contributions to the National Fund coming directly from individuals compared to 70% last year. Thirty-two percent of contributions came from Local Spiritual Assemblies. The percentage of the community participating in the National Fund is similar to last year.

The National Assembly is hopeful that the successive Book 11 campaigns will result in a substantial increase in the pool of friends directly contributing to the National Fund bringing us closer to the vision of the Guardian that giving to the National Fund should be "universally and continuously upheld".

*"The National Fund must be firmly established, generously supported and universally and continuously upheld, for it is the prerequisite of future progress and achievement."*

(From a postscript to a letter dated 25 May 1926 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

<sup>1</sup> All figures are based on draft numbers still subject to audit confirmation



**Contributions Towards the National Fund by Source**

	BE 180	BE 179	Over/Under	% change
Donations from Individual	\$ 681,155	\$ 712,461	(31,306)	-4%
Donations from Individual through Local Spiritual Assembly	\$ 55,388	\$ 26,447	28,941	109%
Donations from Local Spiritual Assemblies	\$ 351,412	\$ 310,266	41,146	13%
Total Contributions to National Fund (unearmarked)	\$ 1,087,955	\$ 1,049,174	38,781	4%



## Funds applied

Total expenditures increased this year by 12% primarily due to expansion and consolidation activities, property running costs and support for international pioneering goals.

National Administration expenses were down \$102 thousand (18%) compared with last year to \$473 thousand mainly due to staffing vacancies. Approximately \$130 thousand is related to insurance, IT expenses, interest expense, transportation, audit fees & professional advice, and various other related items.

Regional expansion and consolidation net expenses increased by \$115 thousand or 22% due to an increase in the number of coordinators and full time support particularly related to cluster development in Auckland and other North Island clusters in line with the Nine Year Plan goals.

External Affairs gross expenses increased by \$20 thousand or 21% related to Race Unity activities. External Affairs was also able to secure \$114 thousand in grants and subsidies from other organisations for the Race Unity Speech Awards, an increase of \$27,000 compared to last year.

A \$22 thousand contribution has been made for the international collaboration goal in line with the amount that was paid in prior years.

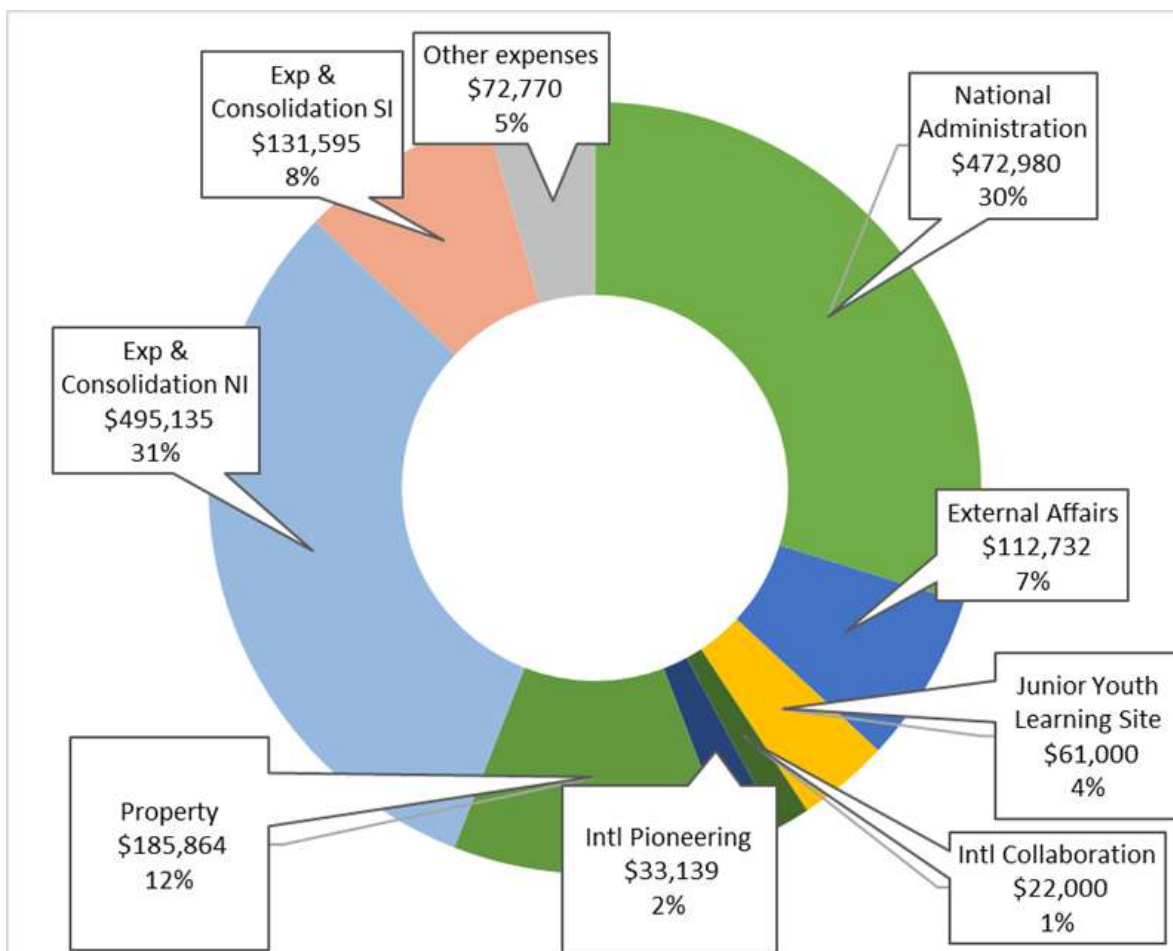
The National Fund contributes towards the site for Australia/New Zealand/Timor Leste learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. This year a contribution of \$61 thousand has been to paid to support this important program, a substantial increase from last year's contribution of \$37 thousand.

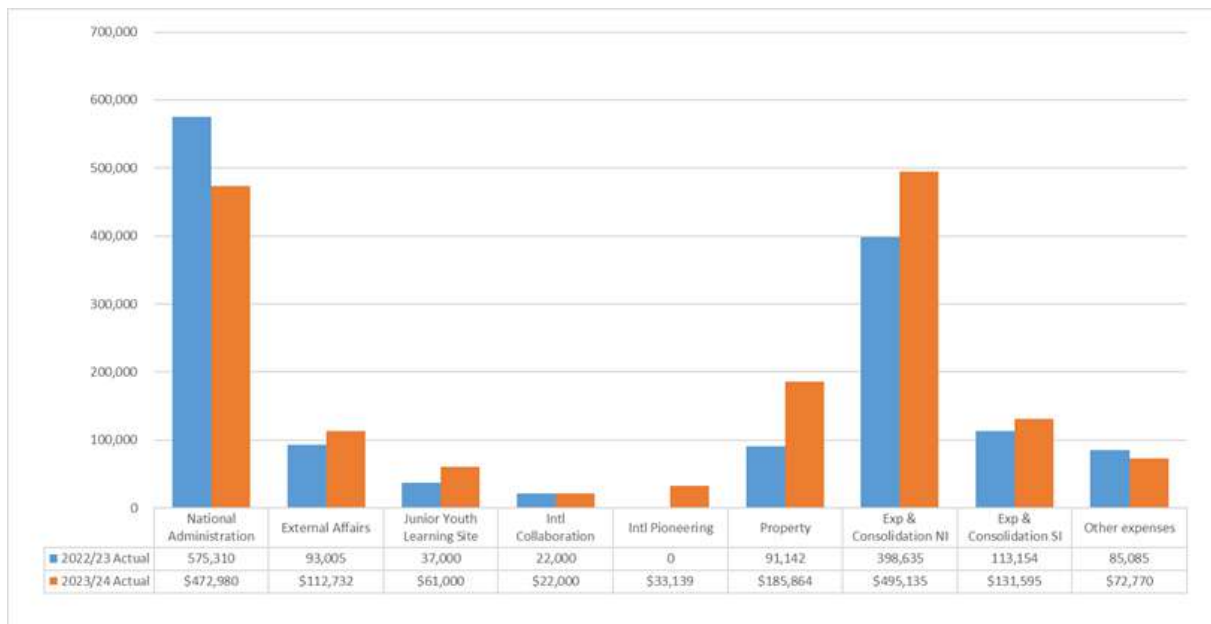
The Bahá'í Distribution Service's net proceeds were a net surplus of \$12 thousand.

The Te Whare Akoranga project was completed with the facility available for wider usage since the middle of 180 B.E. Operating expenses for Te Whare Akoranga for 180 B.E. was \$130 thousand excluding depreciation and excluding provisions for future repairs and maintenance. Income from hiring Te Whare Akoranga was \$52 thousand. Operating a training facility on this scale is an important area of learning for the community.

Other rental properties generated \$85 thousand in rental income and incurred \$80 thousand of expenses including provisions for future repairs and maintenance (not including depreciation).

As part of the Nine Year Plan the New Zealand community was asked to raise up pioneers for three goal countries. In 180 B.E. over \$33 thousand was invested in supporting international pioneers to meet these goals.





## Assets and liabilities

Assets net of borrowings and reserves remained largely unchanged at \$7 million with cash on hand of \$654 thousand at year end (down from \$724 thousand last year). Total assets of \$11.6 million are primarily in the form of land and buildings. Borrowings, reserves and provisions total \$4.5 million of which \$1.9 million are loans (\$1.6 million from the Universal House of Justice and \$0.3 million from Local Spiritual Assemblies).

Funding for Te Whare Akoranga (\$6.7 million) as well as the unexpected opportunity to purchase the property adjacent to the temple grounds in July 2021 (168 Candia Road) for \$2.04 million has been achieved primarily through specially earmarked contributions from the friends, generous grants from the Bahá'í Development Trust (which was itself started from an

endowment from the Hedi Moani Trust), and existing cash reserves which had accumulated over many years of sacrificial giving by the community. The size and timing of both investments however required us to resort to borrowing NZD 1.6 million of funds (interest free) from the beloved Universal House of Justice in 2023. Over \$119,000 was contributed by the friends towards the repayment of the loan to the Universal House of Justice in 180 B.E.

Our objective as a community is to pay back this generous loan to the Supreme Institution as quickly as possible as well as replenish cash reserves for future needs. All of this while continuing to fund the expansion and consolidation activities and related administrative functioning needs in line with the Nine Year Plan.

## KEY BALANCE SHEET ITEMS

	31 March 2023	31 March 2024
Bank Assets	\$724,082	\$654,451
Other Current Assets	7,032,800	284,190
Fixed Assets	3,791,176	10,630,783
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$11,548,057</b>	<b>\$11,569,424</b>
<b>Total Borrowings</b>	<b>\$4,522,548</b>	<b>\$4,526,070</b>
<b>Reserves and Provisions</b>		
<b>Assets Net of Borrowings Reserves</b>	<b>\$7,025,509</b>	<b>\$7,043,354</b>

- Portions of these funds are earmarked for specific purposes
- Te Whare Akoranga training centre moved from current assets to fixed assets upon completion in 180 B.E.
- Borrowings include \$1.6 million loan from the Universal House of Justice as well as Reserves and Provisions which eventually will need to be paid from cash

*Draft unaudited financial statements*





# REPORTS OF INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES

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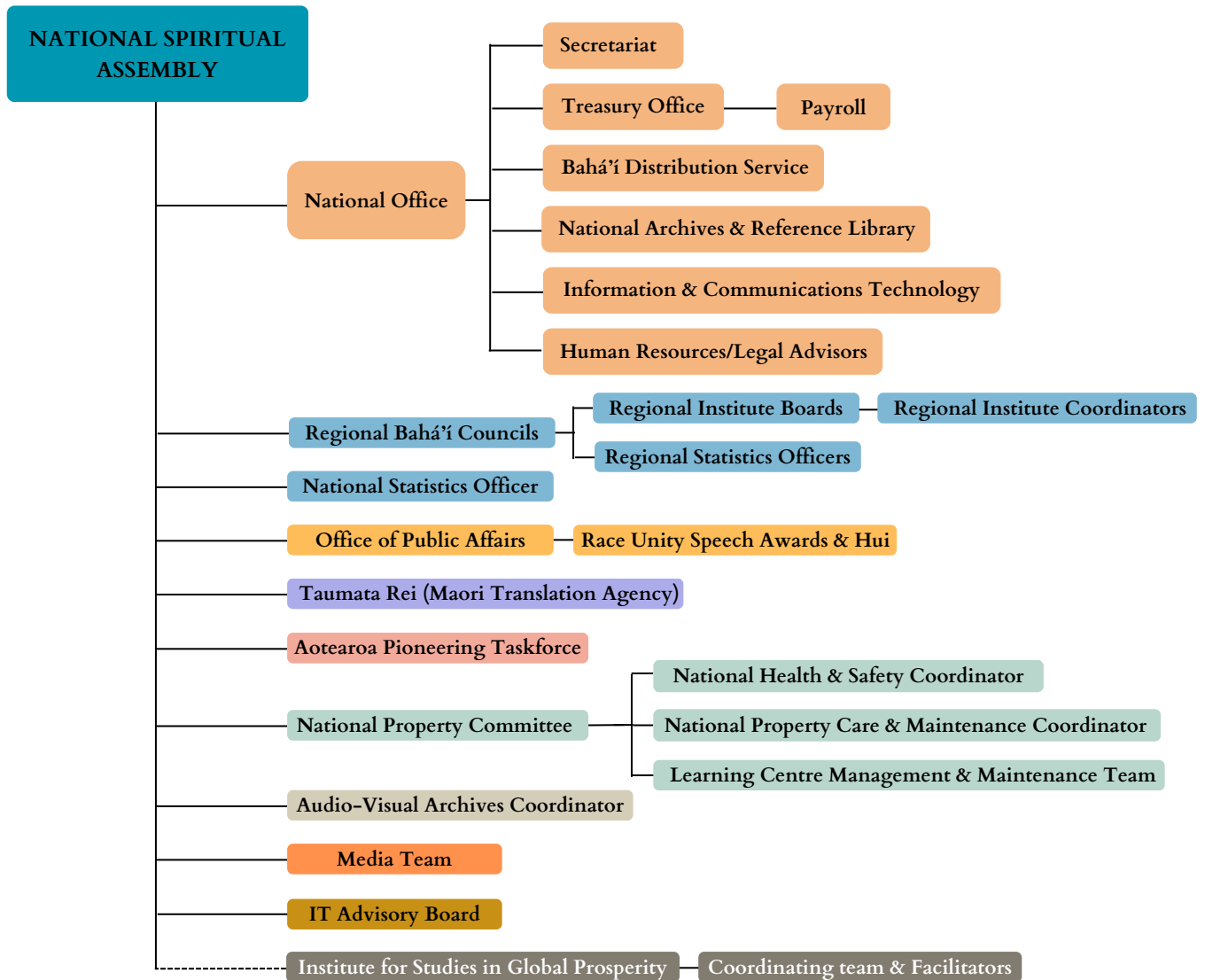


# Overview of institutions and agencies

## Tirohanga Whānui o ngā huihuinga akoranga me ngā huihuinga whakahaere

These are the institutions and agencies that operate under the National Spiritual Assembly

### Organisation chart | Tūtohi whakaraupapatanga



## List of members - Te rāangi o ngā mema

The following is a list of members of Bahá'í institutions and agencies serving during the year 180 B.E.

Agency/Coordinator	Members
<b>National Assembly</b>	Audrey Aumua, Shiva Kolodner, Suzanne Mahon (Secretary), Nick Moss, Vahid Qualls (Chairperson), Marc Rivers (Treasurer), Kim Te'o, Saia Tu'itahi, Huti Watson (Vice-Chairperson)
<b>National Office</b>	<i>Secretariat:</i> Carol Hall, Thibah Irving, Aradhana Kermani, Anita Manning, Zhinous Poorekhorsandi. <i>Past Staff:</i> John Deverell (until July 2023) <i>Treasury Office:</i> Debra Anderson, Zhinous Poorekhorsandi. <i>Past Staff:</i> Juliet Zhu
<b>Regional Bahá'í Council - North Is.</b>	Drisana Brown, Shirin Gabel, Aashish Indorewala (Vice-Chairperson), Sana Lavai-Motlagh (Chairperson), Andrew McNaughton (Treasurer), Brenda Miller, Robyn O'Connor (Secretary), Tezhar Paymani, Erica Zemke-Smith.
<b>Regional Bahá'í Council - South Is.</b>	Devon Gundry (Chairperson), Sama Hall, Ezra Hopkins (Treasurer), Nina Perez (Secretary), Onna Tangifolau. <i>Past member:</i> Elti Sannyasi (until February 2024)
<b>Regional Institute Board – North Is.</b>	Astrid Bunne Namdari, Geeti Faramarzi (Chairperson), David Lew (Treasurer), Naveed Nassiry, Leyla Neilsen, <i>Past members:</i> Adrienne Jervis (until October 2023)
<b>Regional Institute Board – South Is.</b>	<i>Current members:</i> Tautala Asaua-Pesa (Secretary), Azeen Tashakkor
<b>Regional Coordinators – North Is.</b>	<i>Main Sequence:</i> Jaimee Lolo. <i>Past members:</i> Allie Bradley. <i>Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme:</i> Naveed Nassiry. <i>Programme for Spiritual Education of Children:</i> Lyndsey Ula. <i>Regional Development Facilitator:</i> Soheyla Bolouri
<b>Regional Coordinator - South Is.</b>	<i>Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme:</i> Mosi Pesa. <i>Programme for Spiritual Education of Children:</i> Sue Whitley.
<b>National Statistics Officer</b>	Sahel Moayyed
<b>Regional Statistics Officers</b>	<i>North Island:</i> Sohrab Bolouri, Sadiq Lew. <i>South Island:</i> Ina Angova
<b>Aotearoa Pioneering Task Force</b>	Pryanka Nassiry, Adel Salmanzadeh, Lyndsey Ula
<b>Office of Public Affairs Coordinators</b>	Sandra Paymani, Paddy Payne, Maria Reynen-Clayton.
<b>Bahá'í Distribution Service</b>	Zhinous Poorekhorsandi (Coordinator), National Office (printing & dispatch)

## List of members - Continued

Agency/Coordinator	Members
<b>Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity</b>	<i>Coordinating Team:</i> Saba Talebi, Laura Skeaff, Anthony Zemke.
<b>Safeguarding the Interests of Young People Coordinators</b>	<i>Lower North Island:</i> Jan Neilsen. <i>Mid North Island:</i> Dawn Collyns <i>South Island:</i> Peter Manins. <i>Upper North Island:</i> Sherie Teu
<b>Bahá'í Aotearoa – national newsletter</b>	<i>Editing and production:</i> National Secretariat
<b>Media Team</b>	Shah Mohebbi, Vahid Qualls, Mina Sabour.
<b>Audio-Visual Archives Coordinator</b>	Roshan Reyhani
<b>National Archives Coordinator</b>	Margaret Mohamed
<b>Reference Library Coordinator</b>	Steve Cooney
<b>Taumata Rei - Māori Translations</b>	Lily Arahanga, Laykin Crown-Williams (Chairperson), Robbie Daniels-Smith, Wikitoria Makiha. <i>Past members:</i> Atamira Roa
<b>Information Technology Resources</b>	Babak Ivoghlian
<b>IT Advisory Board</b>	Hamada Eleleimy, Devon Gundry, Ezra Hopkins, Babak Ivoghlian, Ben Kolodner, Paddy Payne
<b>National Property Committee</b>	Gray Gibson, Roya Reyhani, Jonathan Rishworth, Zane Sabour (Secretary)
<b>Learning Centre Management &amp; Maintenance Team</b>	Michael Brott (Caretaker), Roshan Reyhani, Jeevan Singaram.
<b>National Property Care &amp; Maintenance Coordinator</b>	Babak Paymani
<b>Human Resources Coordinator</b>	Alison Shackell
<b>Marriage Officiators</b>	Laila Cooper, Faola De Montgomery, Roya Foroughian, Arasteh Hancock, Kevin Heathwaite, Brian Hopkins, Geoffrey Jervis, Lynne Klap, Li-Swan Lim, Suzanne Mahon, Alison Shackell, Nanai Funa Tuiletufuga, Lyndsey Ula, Lucia Wielsma, Joanne Wilson.



# South Island Regional Bahá'í Council

## Te Kaunihera Bahá'í o Te Wai Pounamu

Increased collaboration among the three protagonists and a rise in volition to learn how to release the society-building power of the Faith make the region well placed to advance in the year ahead.

### Introduction

The South Island Regional Bahá'í Council is pleased to present an overview of the achievements, learnings and efforts within the South Island region over the year 180 B.E. The Regional Bahá'í Council shares their aroha with the friends in the region and recognition of their concerted efforts to steer their communities on its "path towards its realisation".

### Regional goals

The regional goals remain the same as 179 B.E., with a particular focus on supporting the Coastal Otago cluster to traverse the third milestone by Ridván 2024.

# Goals for the Nine Year Plan

By Ridván 2024

1

#### Strengthened 3rd Milestone

- Central Canterbury

#### Traverse 3rd Milestone

- Coastal Otago

By Ridván 2026

2

#### Approaching 3rd Milestone

- Te Tau Ihu
- Southland

#### Traverse 2nd Milestone

- Central Otago
- West Coast
- North Canterbury
- South Canterbury

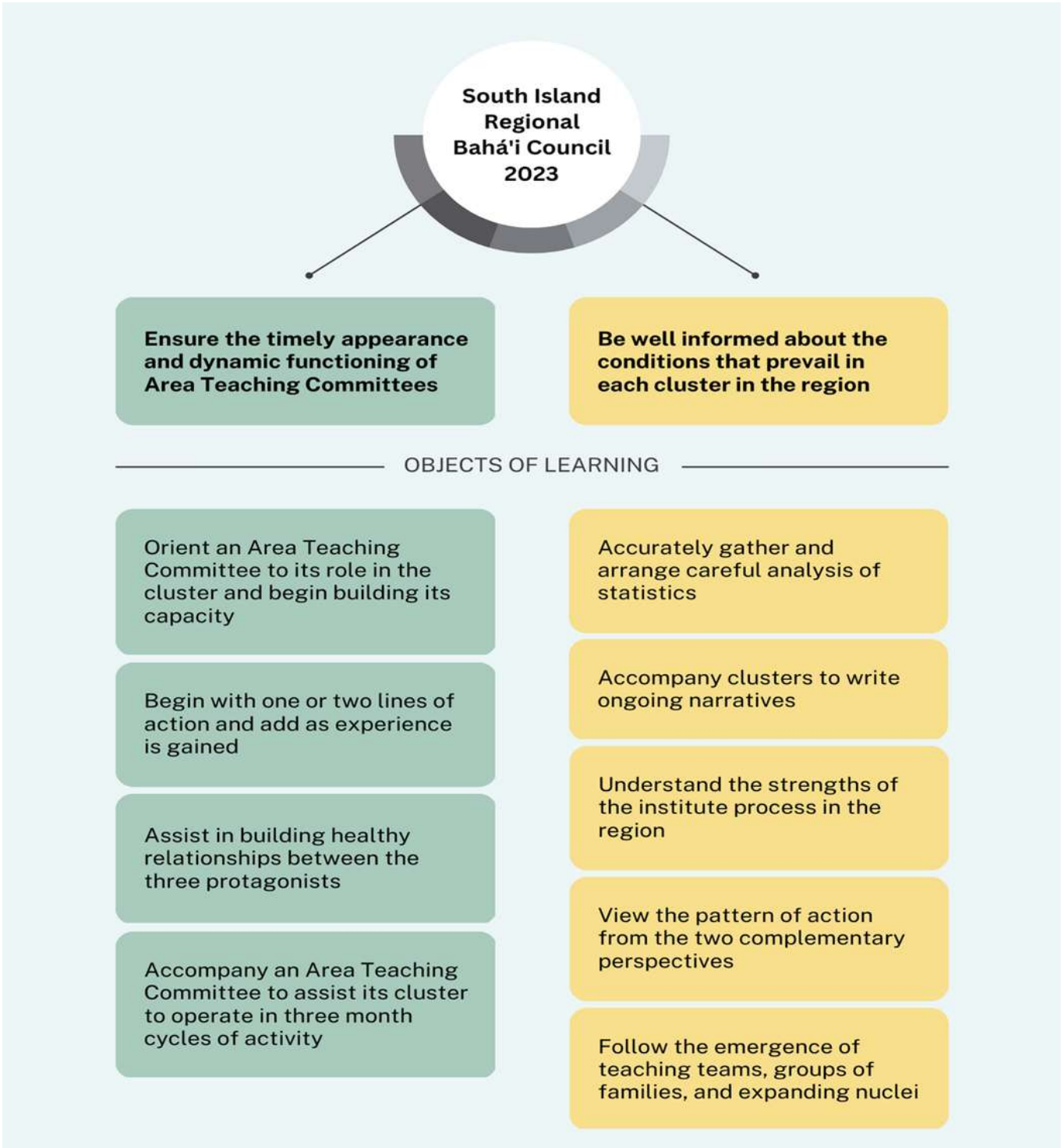
By Ridván 2031

3

#### Traverse 3rd Milestone






- Te Tau Ihu
- Southland
- Central Otago
- West Coast
- North Canterbury
- South Canterbury

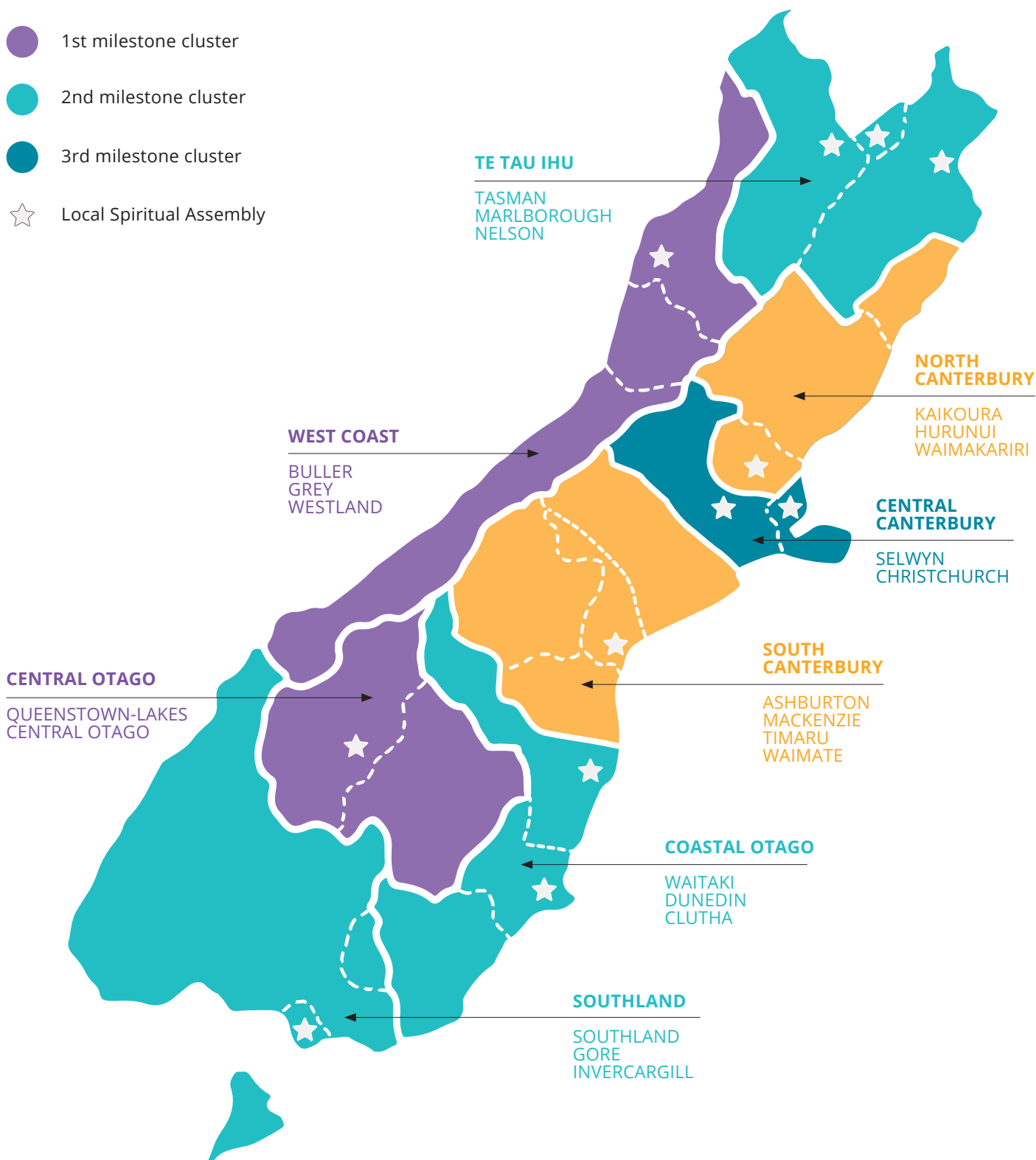
Objects of Learning for 180 B.E.



## Movement of clusters

### AOTEAROA | NEW ZEALAND SOUTH ISLAND

-  New cluster at early stage of development
-  1st milestone cluster
-  2nd milestone cluster
-  3rd milestone cluster
-  Local Spiritual Assembly





# Three-month cycles of activity - the rhythmic pulse of the programme of growth

## Area Teaching Committee

*“...the communities that have advanced most quickly, relative to those whose circumstances and possibilities were similar, have shown an ability to foster unity of thought and to learn about effective action. And they did so without hesitating to act.”*

*Ridván message 2021*

We are learning in Coastal Otago cluster and Central Canterbury to support and raise capacity to learn about effective action with Area Teaching Committees by studying Book 10 together with members of the Regional Bahá'í Council and Auxiliary Board members. In Central Canterbury, cluster agencies and Local Spiritual Assembly representatives, together with the support of regional institutional members as well as Auxiliary Board members, have gained the capacity to gather at least once a cycle to analyse the reality of their cluster and prepare for the cluster reflection meeting. These two strategies have enhanced immensely our ability to foster unity of thought.

***“The concept of accompanying required clarifying and making explicit ways of relating to others in ways entirely different from my background. My background includes four years at military college and three years of squadron duty with the Canadian Air Force. Officers don't accompany. They direct. They may listen, but ultimately instruct, or approve, or disapprove. 10.1 gave us a beginning, through the use of authoritative guidance, examples and exercises, of understanding how personal relationships and behaviours need to evolve.”***

**Area Teaching Committee member**



## Cluster Reflection Meetings

*“A reflection gathering, when properly planned, provide a space where the lessons learned by a growing number of individuals engaged in a common area of activity are synthesized; each participant contributes to the collective advance in understanding.”*

*Exercise 2.1, Sec 15, Unit 1 Book 10 “Accompanying One Another on the Path of Service”*

Part of our learning to support the timely appearance and dynamic functioning of Area Teaching Committees is the operation of the cluster in three monthly cycles of activities. We are learning to strengthen this rhythm in a cluster through cluster reflection meetings coordinated by cluster agencies and Local Spiritual Assemblies. These spaces are occurring in several clusters namely Central Canterbury, Coastal Otago, Southland, Central Otago and North Canterbury.





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## Expansion phase: Children's festivals

*"...collaborative arrangements emerge among groups of families, who organize community-building activities among themselves with a view to widening the embrace of such activities to many nearby households; an informal network of friends provides encouragement and support to the endeavours under way. The character of daily life in such places is adapting to the rise of a culture in which worship and service are cherished activities involving many people at once. Uplifting, well-prepared community gatherings—extending in some cases to camps and festivals—occur with increasing frequency, and music and song feature prominently on such occasions."*

- 30th December 2021 - To the Continental Board of Counsellors

A nascent area of learning for the region are Children's Festivals as a mode of expansion for emerging neighbourhoods, and additionally, a method of consolidation in established neighbourhoods. Following the visit from Counsellor Taraz Nadarajah to our regional institutional meeting, many friends were inspired to utilise this strategy to generate interest and community spirit within their neighbourhoods with the aim of establishing a regular children's class. Children's Festivals were held in North Canterbury, Bryndwr neighbourhood in Central Canterbury, and Pine Hill, Coastal Otago. Many learnings were generated from each endeavour. The organising nuclei greatly understood the importance of creating an uplifting festival space where children engage with spiritual themes such as kindness, friendship, and unity through arts, physical activity, and singing, as well as seizing opportunities for parents and nuclei members to converse with one another and introduce some of the community-building endeavours underway. In total, the three children's festivals engaged around 200 people in varying degrees of attendance or support. This strategy greatly compliments the existing activities in the neighbourhoods as we saw junior youth groups take an active role in providing a service, in outreach, and even organising the children's festival. The festivals also created the opportunity for friends from different clusters to attend, support, and take the learnings to their own neighbourhood to implement.

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## Summer School

Since the pandemic in 2020, this has been our first regional Summer School with 188 participants of which 70 were youth, junior youth and children. Participants from our eight clusters were present as well as friends from the North Island and overseas. Te Kura Raumati collaborated with Summer School this year. The Summer School was characterised by joy and vibrancy, flexibility and forbearance as different regional and local institutions learned to collaborate together in new ways.



# South Island Regional Institute

## Rohe o Te Wai Pounamu

**The South Island Regional Institute Board aims to assist individuals to deepen their understanding of the Bahá'í teachings, and to gain the spiritual insights and practical skills they need to carry out the work of the community.**

### Overview of the progress of the training institute in the South Island

The new year for the South Island Institute Board began with a gathering for the six training institutes in the Australia (3), New Zealand (2) and Timor-Leste (1) regions. Held in March of 2023 in Sydney and arranged by the Continental Board of Counsellors, the gathering focused on studying guidance, reflecting and consulting on the requirements of the Nine Year Plan and the role of the training institute. Other aspects of the gathering included a deeper understanding of the merit of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. The gathering was spiritually charged and uplifting, and the opportunity to learn from more advanced training institutes provided further inspiration, clarity of thought and vision for strengthening the educational endeavours of the training institute in the South Island.

Following the Sydney gathering, the collaborative space was held where a deeper analysis of the progress of the training institute was made. It has long been recognised that the junior youth programme has not been given the same attention as we have seen with the main sequence and children's programme in the last few years. In spite of this, there have been a few settings in the region which have been concentrating on learning about the quality of the delivery and educational experience of the junior youth programme. Specifically, learning to develop the basic capacities required to establish the programme on a sound foundation. It became clear in the collaborative space how critical it was to identify a regional coordinator for the junior youth programme who could serve full time in the South Island, and to be able to advance the learning processes in the settings where advances have been made as well as to implement the objects of learning for

growing the junior youth programme in the region, especially in the two clusters of Central Canterbury and Coastal Otago.

One other feature of the past year has been the continued collaboration and communication between the North and South Island Institute Boards, through informal arrangements such as the monthly zoom meetings of the two institute board secretaries initiated by the Counsellor for New Zealand, individuals from both regions participating in the six-monthly coordinator spaces hosted by the North Island including a few friends participating in each regions' collaborative spaces.

An area that has become an ongoing challenge in the region, and noticeably since coming out of the Covid lockdowns has been the raising and accompaniment of coordinators at the cluster level. In the document "Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning" it describes how coordinators naturally emerge in conditions where the processes for growth and learning are occurring, this pattern has been evident in some clusters in the last three to five years. Prior to the pandemic, identifying and accompanying coordinators was a strength for the South Island where there was a strong scheme of coordination and the regular pattern of coordinator spaces every six months was held and coordinators were arranging regular reflection spaces for tutors, animators and teachers of children's classes at least every cycle. When reflecting on this challenge, perhaps two factors stand out that have contributed to this shift. First, reestablishing the mode of operating within the rhythm of a cycle since coming out of lockdowns has taken some time to rebuild its momentum. While the delivery of the educational programmes in the context of community building processes has continued on a weekly basis,



A collaborative group meeting held in Dunedin, May 2023. Members of the South Island Regional Institute Board and Area Teaching Committee of Coastal Otago were present.



with the increase in the quality of its delivery and participation from the wider community, the flow into the main sequence of courses and participation of youth is still an area to be strengthened.

Another possible factor has been the number of friends who have the requisite qualities, attitudes and experiences are still so few in the region and have been asked to serve in coordinator roles and are often individuals at the heart of the community-building process in their setting.

We have recognised for quite some time how critical it is to have regional coordinators who could accompany cluster coordinators.

At this time, we have a regional coordinator for the children's programme and a regional coordinator for the junior youth programme. The former has steadily grown in strength in the last three to four years while the latter has been able to advance quite quickly since a full-time individual has been appointed to the role. Interestingly, the main sequence of courses which is currently the only educational imperative with no regional coordinator to follow the learning process and accompany the friends is the imperative which requires the most attention. We have seen how critical it is to have individuals who have the qualities, attitudes and experiences to serve full time, especially in the regional coordinator role and this strategy will be a focus for the institute board in the coming year. An arrangement the training institute has begun and as described in the 30 December 2021 message by the Universal House of Justice is the informal arrangement of "separate teams have also begun to focus respectively on children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles, identifying factors that contribute to their effectiveness and finding ways to assist the friends involved in each avenue." These teams will be described briefly in the sections that follow.

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## Progress of the programme for the spiritual education of children

The programme for spiritual education of children in the South Island has seen some interesting learning over the last year. Experiences with organising children's festivals are becoming a regular feature of a cycle, with adjoining clusters and neighbourhoods working together to plan and run them, rich with learning and contributing to the community spirit in the neighbourhood.

There has also been a shift in the understanding of the programme of the spiritual education of children- as a programme and not a series of incidental classes. In a number of settings, friends are developing a vision of where their children's programme will be by the end of the Nine Year Plan- seeing the progress through the grades as natural and something to work and plan for, and ensuring that there is a solid intake for the Grade 1 class, the foundation of all the grades- similar to the

Ruhi process. Even when numbers dwindle, we see the dedication of the friends to ensure that the few children can still benefit from as many of the grades as possible as preparation before moving into the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme.

Most teachers of the children's classes have adopted an outward orientation, with many friends of the Faith and their families becoming involved in the programme- families often supporting the class with refreshments and helping with babysitting the younger children of the teacher and even assisting the teaching of children. For the first time this year, 2024, we have a class of 9 children, 7 of them from the wider community, beginning Grade 4, in this, their fourth year of the programme. In this neighbourhood some of the parents have been trained and are involved in teaching as well, which contributes to the vibrancy of the programme. Much has been learnt in this and many other neighbourhoods about building deep bonds of friendship with the families involved in the programme, and establishing other activities together such as combined family devotional meetings and Ruhi Book studies for parents, underlining the essential connectedness of the Institute. Also, in the last year we have seen a number of children, many of them friends of the Faith, complete either Grade 2 or Grade 3 before transitioning into the junior youth programme.

Thus, we can see evidence of the programme taking root in many small settings and neighbourhoods around the region- Halswell in Christchurch, Pine Hill in Dunedin, Jack's Point in Queenstown and Appleby in Invercargill. In these settings we are seeing the multiple grades emerge as the friends strive together to learn and advance their understanding of the programme further. We also see other areas in Christchurch and North Canterbury where successful festivals have been held and the potential for growth is evident. In many other areas of the motu, we see friends establishing classes to learn more about the programme, and although some classes may only be sustained for a short period of time, there is always learning and advancement in understanding, with the friends trying different strategies such as children's festivals as well as Whānau Days, in order to reach out to those around them and build deeper friendships, looking for opportunities to converse on the importance of spiritual education of children with those families around them, building the capacity to establish a weekly children's programme. Although in numerical terms the number of classes and participants involved in the programme has not significantly increased, the learning and the experience that has been generated over the last few years has meant that the numbers we see today are classes that have been established with an outward orientation and efforts are being made to ensure that the new participants will attend multiple grades before transiting to the junior youth programme and thus as new children enter Grade 1 we will begin to see a steady increase in both numbers of classes and participants over the next year.

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## Progress of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme

In the South Island, 11 junior youth groups have been established in five of its eight clusters with at least 90% participation of junior youth from the wider community. As an informal arrangement of support, two teams comprised of animators have been established to assist the regional coordinator to follow the process of learning to implement the objects of learning for this programme solely focused on *'helping the local friends to establish the programme on a sound foundation upon which it can grow to edify numbers of junior youth and invigorate the whole community'*. - *Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning*

The objects of learning are:

- Learning to establish a cadre of friends dedicated to the spiritual empowerment of junior youth where there are junior youth groups being established;
- The path to engage 50-100 junior youth in the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme
- Raise 5 to 10 new animators who will establish new groups;
- Doubling our numbers of experienced Book 5 tutors (in the last few years there have been at least 3 people regularly tutoring Book 5).

One regional junior youth camp was held in April 2023 with 30-40 junior youth and a support team of 20 adults. The camp had two groups where the younger group studied and completed the Glimmerings of Hope text and the older group studied The Human Temple text. The impact of the camp on junior youth provided the opportunity to form new friendships, establish stronger relationships of members with their peers from their community, socialise and engage in recreational and artistic activities.



Junior youth from Oamaru organised a pizza fundraiser initiative

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## Main sequence of courses

The Book 11: Material Means nationwide campaign which was launched in March 2023 and was an opportunity for the friends in the region to study the three units.

Over 80 friends were able to study and complete the first unit of the course. Following the process of learning for this campaign were three experienced tutors who provided monthly online reflections for the tutors and other support.

Further informal efforts have been made to establish an educational team comprised of experienced tutors to help learn the objects of learning identified by the collaborative group:

- Ensuring a steady flow of participants into the main sequence of courses
- New cohorts of youth and their families entering the courses
- Implementing the practical elements as a promoted in each course
- Learning about the quality of the delivery modes of the institute process.

An element of focus has been to learn more deeply about what has been described in the 30 December 2021 message including the section on the educational endeavours and the training institute. This has involved online content studies of Ruhi Book 7 as an extension of earlier content studies of Ruhi Books 1 and 2 in the last two to three years. In August of 2023, a group of tutors, animators and teachers were invited to participate in a gathering to explore more the possibility of educational teams as an informal arrangement for assisting the training institute to pursue its objects of learning. Guidance was studied with consultation and reflections on the needs of each educational imperatives where tutors for example were able to return to their own setting and reconsider how they could apply their learnings through fostering conversations on the community-building processes and how to consolidate these conversations through participating in the study of the first course of the main sequence. This is still an area of learning for the main sequence team.

Across the region, the main support system for tutors has been to provide online tutor reflections as an alternative to supporting clusters who have yet to reestablish the rhythm and pattern of in person tutor encounter spaces in the cluster. In the coming year, this will be an area to strengthen in addition to establishing the regular pattern of institute campaigns and junior youth camps during school holidays.

# North Island Regional Bahá'í Council

## Te Kaunihera Bahá'í o Te Ika a Maui

'The overarching regional object of learning, prioritised by all of the regional institutions, has been learning about how to move clusters past the third milestone of growth.'

### Overview

***"It will be imperative that all Regional Councils pay close attention to the operation of the training institute and the functioning of Area Teaching Committees. With this in mind, they will find it necessary to create and refine mechanisms that serve to further the pattern of growth unfolding at the cluster level and the learning process associated with it. These will include a well-functioning regional office that provides the secretary with basic organizational support; a sound system of accounting that accommodates diverse channels for the flow of funds to and from clusters; an efficient means of communication that takes into consideration the reality of life in villages and neighbourhoods; and, where warranted, physical structures that facilitate intensified and focused activity. What is important to acknowledge in this respect is that only if the Councils themselves are engaged in a process of learning will such mechanisms prove to be effective. Otherwise, while ostensibly created to support learning in action by an increasing number of participants in neighbourhoods and villages, systems being developed may well work against it in subtle ways, stifling, unintentionally, rising aspirations at the grassroots."***

*28 December 2010 message from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.*



Photo shows Regional Bahá'í Council members and Area Teaching Committee and Assembly representatives from the Triumph cluster at a weekend meeting hosted in Palmerston North in 2023.

### Mission

The primary responsibility at this time is to support and guide the work of expansion and consolidation in cluster after cluster.

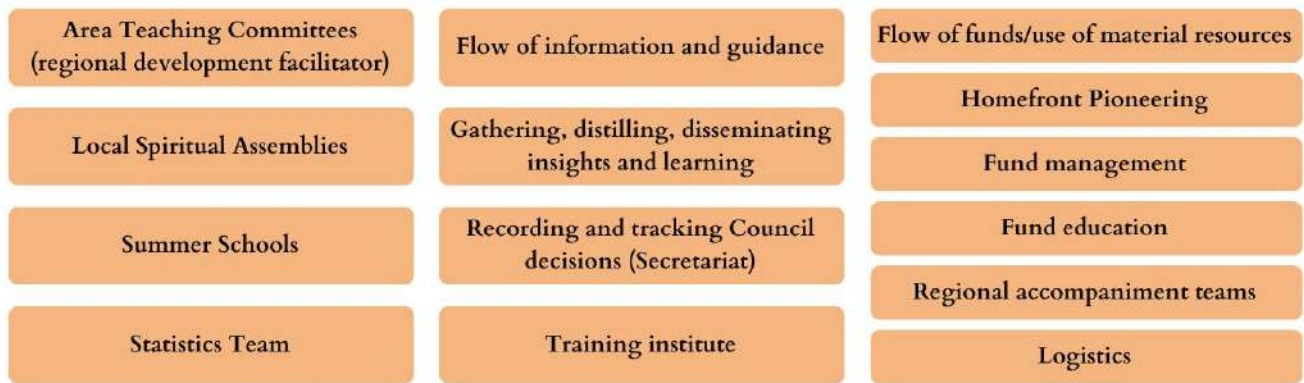
### Internal organisation

The Regional Office expanded its personnel this year through the appointment of a regional statistics team, which increased the team by one. There is currently one regional development facilitator and a communication and learning assistant to support the work of the secretariat. The Council has as one of its ongoing priorities the further development of this Office to meet the demands of the Nine Year Plan: "raising capacity for administration at all levels." (30 December 2021 message from the Universal House of Justice.)

Some of the areas the Regional Office is responsible for are: the flow of information, pioneer deployment, funding for individuals and families, networking with Assemblies throughout the region, accompanying Area Teaching Committees, and working with the Regional Institute Board.



## SCOPE OF WORK FOR THE REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL



### Regional accompaniment teams

The region of the North Island has been divided into three areas that cover all the clusters in the North Island, and a team of people from a variety of institutions has been assigned to each area. The regional teams are comprised of members of the Auxiliary Board, the Regional Bahá'í Council, the Regional Institute Board, regional institute coordinators, and the regional development facilitator (who serves the “central” team).

The Council is organised into teams that focus on key areas of learning for the region, as defined by the Council. The learning teams follow objects of learning that the Council sets for them and brings learning back to the Council to inform its work. Cyclic reviews of learning and focus areas are undertaken at Council meetings.

### Strategies for assisting a cluster to progress along the continuum of development

**“There are a few key elements of this approach [to pass the third milestone along the continuum of growth]. One is to raise or reinforce an expanding nucleus of friends who are able to find creative ways to dedicate significant time in the field, and who strive with intensity in a receptive neighbourhood to foster a vibrant community-building process. Where such individuals are not available, international or homefront pioneers may be required to support the efforts of the local friends. ‘It is anticipated,’ the House of Justice states in its call for pioneers dated 24 May 2022 ‘that these friends would come from stronger clusters, settle in less advanced centres of activity in receiving countries and regions, and quickly become part of an emerging nucleus of individuals committed to cultivating a vibrant pattern of community life’. Another element is the support from an individual with grassroots experience in engaging the inhabitants of a neighbourhood or village—especially young people and**

**their families—in the community-building process and accompanying them in their service. In more advanced regions, this role may be played by an Auxiliary Board member or an assistant, or by a regional institute coordinator; however, in places where someone from outside the region is needed, this role is typically assumed by an institute resource person. Other important elements include engaging a core group of individuals from within the nucleus in periodic reflection with others on a similar learning path, as well as ensuring that the friends in the nucleus are connected effectively to the learning process in a strong cluster that has passed the third milestone, and has a vibrant community-building process in one or more centres of intense activity. This connection could be brought about, for example, by having the core group from within the nucleus visit a more advanced cluster for an extended period, attend gatherings organized in that cluster for reflection, or participate in online spaces with friends from that cluster.”**

*International Teaching Centre, “Assisting Countries and Regions at an Early Stage of Development: A Resource for the Continental Boards of Counsellors”, June 2022.*

### Regional goals for 2026 identified collaboratively by all regional institutions and agencies

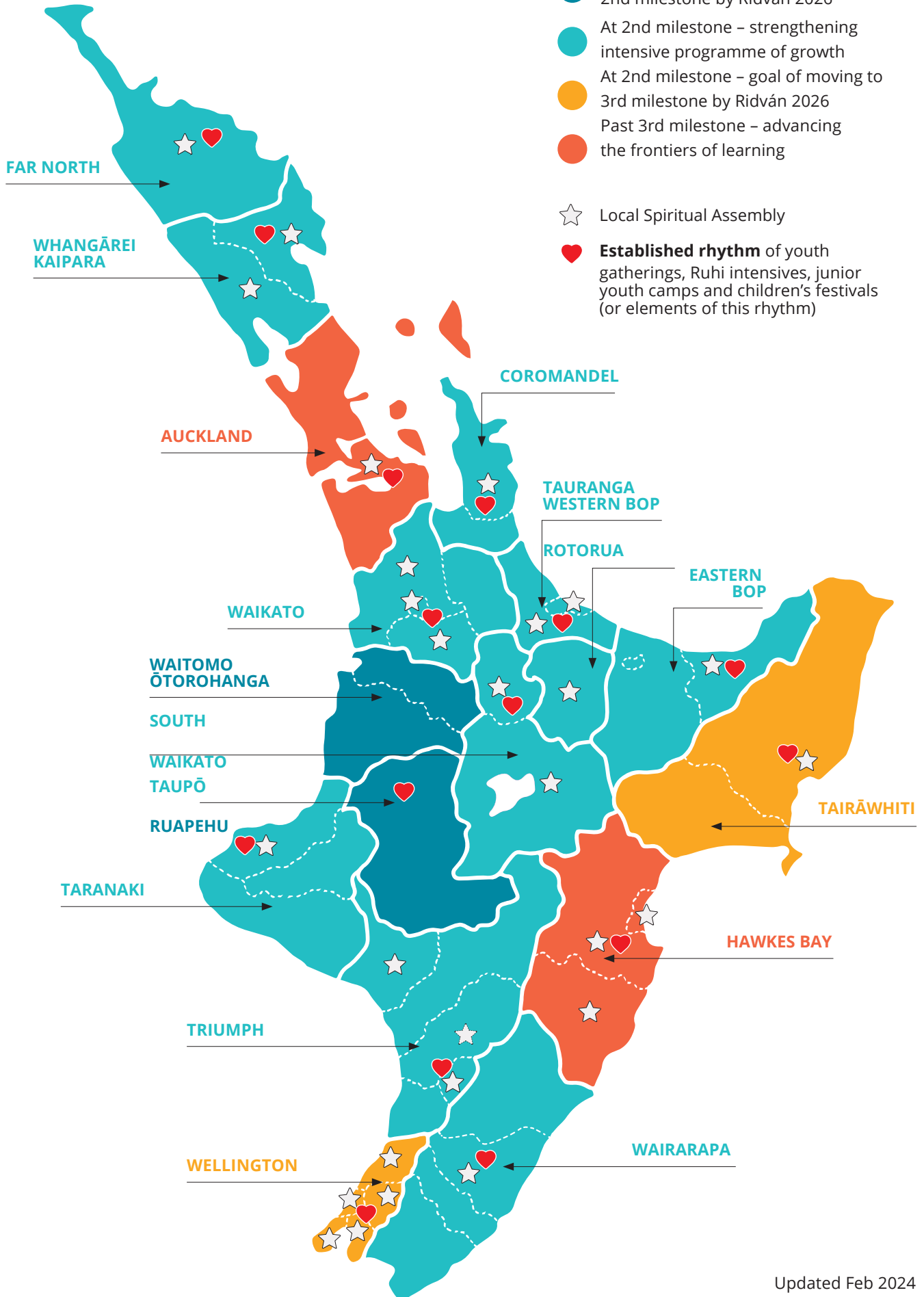
**Moving to the third milestone:** Tairāwhiti has elements of all strategies for moving a cluster to the third milestone: it needs a year or so to deepen these and grow, working closely with Hawke’s Bay as a cluster further along the continuum.

Wellington has elements of all strategies and a scheme of coordination: its needs are ongoing tutor development and working closely with Hawke’s Bay/Auckland as clusters further along the continuum.

**Moving to the second milestone:** Ruapehu has an expanding nucleus and a strong junior youth programme. It has an initial flow into the institute process: its needs are to work with families to sustain the growth.

AOTEAROA | NEW ZEALAND  
**NORTH ISLAND**

- At 1st milestone – goal of moving to 2nd milestone by Ridván 2026
- At 2nd milestone – strengthening intensive programme of growth
- At 2nd milestone – goal of moving to 3rd milestone by Ridván 2026
- Past 3rd milestone – advancing the frontiers of learning
- ☆ Local Spiritual Assembly
- ♥ **Established rhythm** of youth gatherings, Ruhi intensives, junior youth camps and children’s festivals (or elements of this rhythm)



Updated Feb 2024

# Treasury

## Activities

- A significant decrease in homefront pioneering and a corresponding increase in financial support to enable friends to give more time for service.
- Mobilisation of the Regional Bahá'í Council as a body to consult with Local Spiritual Assemblies, agencies and members of nuclei in their own clusters.
- The Council and Regional Fund were given the bounty of supporting the decentralized Summer Schools and Kura Raumati where needed.

## Achievements

- Learning alongside the Auckland Local Spiritual Assembly related to budget planning for growth; specifically, early consultation among the institutions, agencies, and friends at the grassroots.
- Creation of frameworks for the roles of individuals needed to undertake certain aspects of service. In addition, establishing a sound process of identifying these individuals.
- A deeper understanding of the principle of deputisation at the local community level and the long-term development of the training institute.
- Raising believers' understanding of the nature of the Fund and strengthening the culture of generous and sacrificial giving through the national Book 11 campaign.

## Challenges

With the essential and substantial financial commitment to the development of Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í, the Regional Fund has been hard pressed to meet the material requirements for growth across the North Island. The Council has had to maintain an expansive mindset while trying to work within a restricted budget.

## Successes

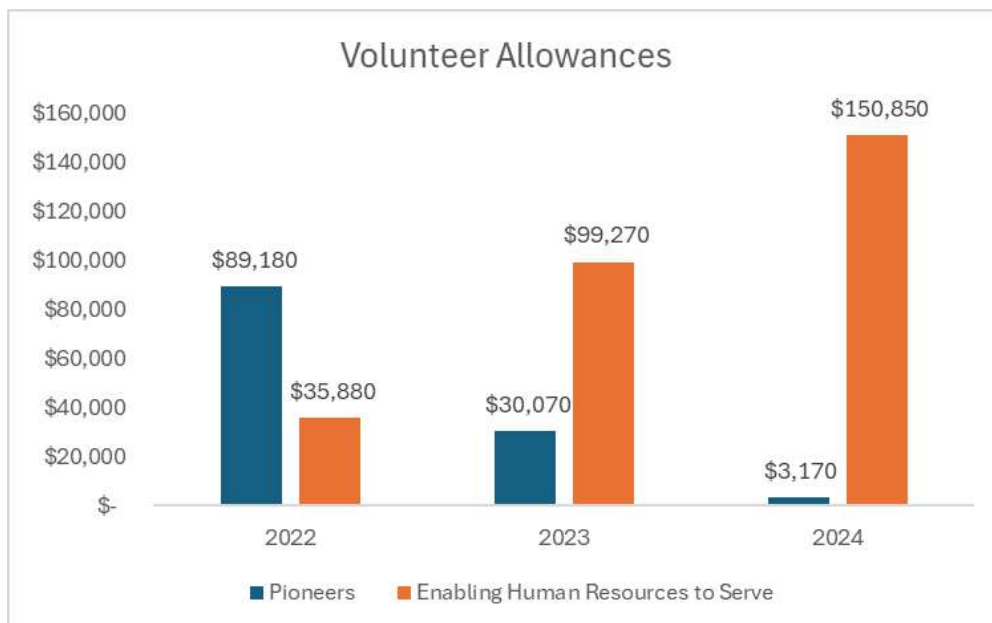
- Host Local Spiritual Assemblies' and community financial support of summer schools and the Kura Raumati.
- An increasing awareness of the friends drawing on financial support by the Fund and of the requirement of providing GST receipts in order to allow 15% to be claimed back from the IRD.

## Vision

- Identifying individuals to assist with new areas of the treasury, as expansion accelerates and an increased capacity for funding coordination becomes evident.
- Continuing Fund education and strengthening this aspect of believers' spiritual connection to the Faith.
- Enabling communities to plan strategies for growth which are linked to a defined budget.
- Strengthening understanding of the Local Fund and its use for cluster growth.
- Renewed deployment of homefront pioneers.

## North Island Regional Bahá'í Council - Volunteer Allowance Movements 12 mths to 31 January

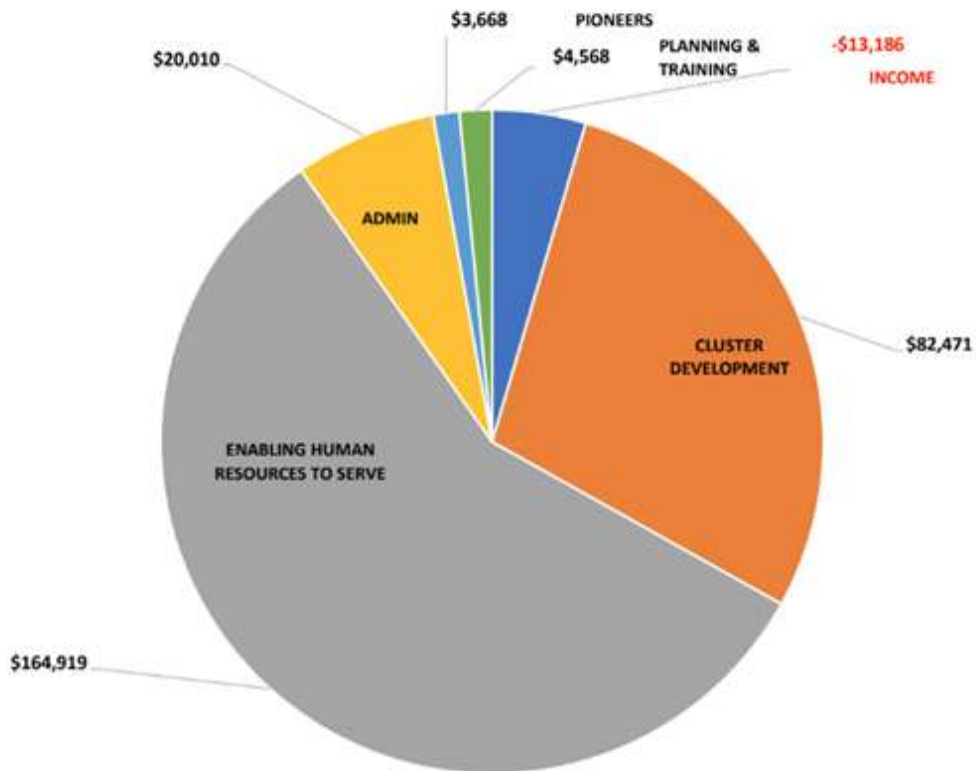
		2022	2023	2024
<b>Pioneers</b>	\$	89180	30070	3170
<b>Enabling Human Resources to Serve</b>	\$	35880	99270	150850
<b>Total</b>	\$	<u>125060</u>	<u>129340</u>	<u>154020</u>





Net Expenses	\$	%
	\$262,450	
Income	-\$13,186	-5.0
Cluster Development	\$82,471	31.4
Enabling Human Resources	\$164,919	62.8
Administration	\$20,010	7.6
Pioneers	\$3,668	1.4
Planning & Training	\$4,568	1.7

**North Island Bahá'í Council  
Total Net Expenditure  
12 months to 31 January 2024**



# Movement of Clusters

## cluster status (currently)

There are 17 clusters in the North Island

First Milestone	Second Milestone	Third Milestone
(2)	(13)	(2)
Ruapehu Waitomo/Ōtorohanga	Far North Thames/Coromandel Eastern Bay of Plenty Rotorua South Waikato/Taupō <i>Passed the second milestone in April 2023</i> Waikato Tairāwhiti <i>Passed the second milestone in Nov 2022</i> Taranaki Tauranga/Western Bay of Plenty Triumph Wellington Wairarapa Whangārei/Kaipara	Auckland <i>At the frontiers of learning</i>  Hawke's Bay <i>Passed the third milestone in 179 B.E. and now consolidating its capacities</i>
<span style="background-color: #f0e68c; padding: 2px;">Clusters that moved to the next milestone during Nine Year Plan</span>		

## cluster goals for 2026

First Milestone	moving >	Second Milestone	moving >	Third Milestone
Waitomo/Ōtorohanga	Ruapehu	Thames/Coromandel Eastern Bay of Plenty Rotorua Far North South Waikato/Taupō Taranaki Tauranga/Western Bay of Plenty Triumph Wairarapa Whangārei/Kaipara	to move to third milestone by 2026  Wellington Tairāwhiti  <i>potentially</i> move to third milestone by 2026  Waikato	Auckland  Hawke's Bay

## **Auckland**

Auckland has set for itself a goal to engage 300+ junior youth in the study of 10+ texts of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. Striving to achieve this goal has led to increased collaboration among the institutions and agencies serving the cluster and helped them and the community maintain a unified vision. It has also made them more conscious of the role that material means will play, particularly to support those that have “developed considerable capacity in supporting the community’s educational endeavours” (30 December 2021 message) to serve formally.

The Manurewa neighbourhood is increasingly serving as a learning site, hosting and visiting neighbourhood teams from other clusters.

In order to accelerate sustained growth, Auckland is continuing to learn about: accompanying groups of individuals, families, and households who make a conscious decision to see themselves as belonging to an expanding nucleus; the fundamentals of raising tutors, animators and teachers; how the training institute is orienting its thinking to contribute to the transformation of community life; and supporting youth to regard the future development of the training institute as their sacred charge.

## **Hawke’s Bay**

In its second year since passing the third milestone, Hawke’s Bay cluster has advanced in its capacity to reflect on and distil learning. From this process, several learning documents and narratives have emerged. The Pā Harakeke neighbourhood continues to be at the forefront of growth, with core activities run weekly and intensively each cycle, a growing youth movement, social action projects, and a recently completed campaign to increase the participation in the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme.

The nucleus of Pā Harakeke has also dedicated time to assisting nuclei in other parts of Hawke’s Bay as well as travelling to other clusters to support growth. Institute camps supported by friends across the cluster are held every school holiday, ensuring a constant flow of youth through the sequence of courses. Collaboration between the three Spiritual Assemblies, the Area Teaching Committee, and the three institute coordinators has led to increased systematisation as ad hoc arrangements give way to more intentional processes for managing the complexities of growth.

## **Waikato**

The goal for Waikato is to continue to work towards the third milestone. It has a strong children’s programme, offering Grades 1 through 5. The first group of children has recently graduated from Grade 5 and entered the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. The

challenge for the children’s programme is to be more outward focused. The cluster is trying to maintain cyclic intensives and junior youth noho. Nascent groups of families formed with encouragement and support from both Assemblies and the Area Teaching Committee. Another highlight this year for the Waipa community has been a significant advance in building relationships with local tangata whenua. There has been an enthusiastic uptake for the Book 11 campaign, with five to six study circles offered across the cluster.

## **Wellington**

The goal for the Wellington cluster is to reach the third milestone before 2026. The cluster has made significant progress towards achieving this goal this year. There are nuclei operating in multiple neighbourhoods, in particular, in Wellington central, Paraparaumu, and Naenae. The Area Teaching Committee is actively supporting the expansion and consolidation through the holding of regular reflection meetings and cluster institutional meetings: there is a flow into and through the courses of the institute, a strong junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, and growth in neighbourhoods as well as across the cluster. A pattern of Ruhi institute and junior youth camps are held each cycle and have been sustained for several years in the Paraparaumu area. A narrative has been written, demonstrating the growth in Paraparaumu by working with families and ensuring a flow into the institute process.

## **Tairāwhiti**

Although Tairāwhiti only passed the second milestone in the previous Bahá’í year, it is moving swiftly towards the third milestone. The intensive neighbourhood in Kaiti continues to go from strength to strength. It began with a strong junior youth programme, which is flowing into a burgeoning children’s programme. Youth who have been in the process for a while are arising to serve and being accompanied into the field of action, and a cadre of tutors has been raised up. After receiving support from attending Hawke’s Bay and Waikato intensives and junior youth camps, Tairāwhiti is now into its third cycle of holding junior youth camps in its own cluster, including offering a Book 1 at the most recent camp. The growth that is occurring is strengthening the institutions, and individuals are crossing the threshold of belief in Bahá’u’lláh.

## **South Waikato/Taupō**

The South Waikato/Taupō cluster passed the second milestone along the continuum of growth in April 2023, and the friends are keenly learning about how to move towards passing the third milestone. Some of the activities that are the beating heartbeat of the cluster



are individual initiatives across three neighbourhoods: Putaruru, Tokoroa, and Taupō; devotional meetings in multiple towns and with friends from the wider community; the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme in Tokoroa; and the ongoing Ruhi Book 11 campaign. Some youth from the junior youth programme were happy to attend the Hamilton Summer School. The pattern of study, action, and reflection that the nucleus in the South Waikato community is engaged in offers a model to the Taupō district of a “goal to reach” as it begins to form its own incipient nucleus. Shortly after the release of the 28 November 2023 message from the House of Justice, friends in Taupō decided to study it for 30 minutes on Zoom every morning. Once it ended, the friends decided to start again from the beginning, and the Tablet of Carmel was added as the opening prayer before every session. This is indicative of a change in this small community, which is beginning to run its own activities. There is a great deal of joyous friendship and fellowship amongst the friends across the cluster, and, in their open and outward orientation, this unity is magnetic.



Photo shows the South Waikato community at a cluster reflection meeting after passing the second milestone in July 2023.

### **Taranaki**

The cluster has maintained the elements of a second milestone cluster. The junior youth spiritual empowerment programme is firmly established, and regular youth nights are held. A success is the holding of camps, whānau days, and festivals throughout the year. There is an emerging scheme of coordination in place, which ensures the holding of regular cluster reflection meetings. A challenge is operating in the rhythm of three-monthly cycles and re-establishing the nucleus of a core team.

### **Triumph**

This cluster is moving towards the third milestone. The elements which need strengthening are a nucleus that continues to expand and the systematic holding of

camps and festivals. There have been several whānau noho held, which have strengthened both the children’s class and junior youth programmes. There is a strong scheme of coordination in place, which meets regularly, studies guidance, and ensures a regular expansion and consolidation pattern. The cluster agencies meet regularly and enable the continued focus on the rhythm of three-monthly cycles.

### **Rotorua**

In Rotorua, a rhythm of regular devotional gatherings is bringing momentum to the community, with new friends of the Faith coming every time. The Local Spiritual Assembly is becoming more systematic about setting goals and reflecting periodically, increasingly operating in a mode of learning. Individuals are beginning to work with like-minded organisations through social action, presenting new opportunities for collaboration and teaching.

### **Wairarapa**

The goal for this cluster is to advance along the continuum of development towards the third milestone. Two children’s classes have been sustained this year, and one has run consistently for three years. Both classes are comprised of local friends with very few Bahá’ís in attendance. One class is held at the Kura Kaupapa Māori o Wairarapa, and this year saw a transition of five of these children into the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. Two local animators were accompanied, and several kura taiohi were held. The friends in the cluster are engaging many families in the community-building activities, and this is a success. The challenge is to raise more protagonists to take charge of the process, and there are some glimmerings of development in this area.

### **Whangārei/Kaipara**

There are currently two regular children’s classes and one regular junior youth group, and there is active community participation in the higher institute courses, including the 2023 national Book 11 campaign. Four youths have transitioned from the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme to the main sequence of courses. They travel to Auckland regularly for the school-holiday institute camps. The first junior youth camp was held in the cluster in October 2023 after a year of hiatus. This was a combined effort of the nucleus group and the Area Teaching Committee. Two of the youths assisted in facilitating in the recent local junior youth camp. The aim is to have regular camps every cycle and to involve more parents in them. A whānau camp was held in February 2024 with the study of Ruhi Book 12.2. This is an area of learning to establish a regular pattern of study and deepen the bonds of love and friendship in the community. Two of

the nuclei are engaging their community of interest in regular devotional programs, extending invitations to the junior youth camps.

The Area Teaching Committee is learning to accompany different groups within the cluster, and the recent appointment of a cluster coordinator will help to nurture and grow the institute process. The cluster is re-engaging with the institute process, and a culture of studying the guidance is growing. A challenge for the cluster is to engage in a pattern of expansion and consolidation with its accompanying outward-looking focus.

### **Far North**

The Far North continues to maintain its potential to move forwards on the continuum of growth towards the third milestone. Its notable developments and strengths have been the commencement and sustaining of a children's class in Kerikeri with a systematic and focused core team looking towards expansion; the appointment of a children's class coordinator; support from Whangārei/Kaipara junior youth core team and adjacent cluster junior youth camps; the continuity of a centre of intense activity within a Māori cultural setting, despite multiple and challenging circumstances; a core team focused on initiatives promoting engagement of Māori, both within the cluster and across Aotearoa New Zealand; and the Local Spiritual Assembly actively engaging, supporting, and reflecting with the Area Teaching Committee. The Area Teaching Committee has been engaging with regional learning spaces and studies guidance for growth from the Universal House of Justice and the Regional Bahá'í Council. Also, the ongoing teaching endeavours of a homefront pioneer team with their whānau and local sector, with accompaniment from their Local Spiritual Assembly, Auxiliary Board members, Regional Bahá'í Council, and community support; and a steadfast core team of venerable Bahá'ís, who, while significantly health challenged, actively support and initiate activities relating to the Plan's framework.

### **Eastern Bay of Plenty**

The focus has been on strengthening the core nucleus—dividing their time between mahi and service. There has been much effort made over the year to restart holding regular reflection spaces and devotional meetings. The friends in the cluster have taken their junior youth to Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti clusters for them to gain experience and attend camps.

A new cohort of youth have moved into Book 1 and are continuing their learning. Plans are made for a whānau camp this April (2024), and it is hoped that this will lead to the strengthening of relationships amongst families connected to the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme.



Western Bay of Plenty community held a junior youth camp which was held at Redwood Valley Farm in Paengaroa, outside of Te Puke, 24-26 November 2023

### **Western Bay of Plenty**

The cluster has started a rhythm of junior youth camps, and the goal is to hold them twice a year. There are regular whānau days held to assist with the expansion of children's classes. The nucleus meets regularly for reflection and planning. The programme for the spiritual education of children is very strong, with multiple classes and friends with a great deal of experience. A challenge for the cluster is ensuring the training of teachers to meet the needs.

### **Thames/Coromandel**

The goal for this cluster is to reach the third milestone by the end of the Nine Year Plan. The nucleus in Thames is continually strengthening its bond with a group of young families through a weekly devotional space as well as through a rhythm of whānau camps. Some other groups of families are also becoming established around the region and are engaged in initiating devotional spaces and firesides to deepen new and existing community bonds.

### **Ruapehu**

The goal for this cluster is to reach the second milestone in 2026. The junior youth spiritual empowerment programme has been strengthened though the deployment of pioneers. A success to note is the beginning of a flow of friends into and through the institute courses and a new enrolment. The youth are attending camps in the Waikato cluster.

### **Waitomo/Ōtorohanga**

The goal for this cluster is to reach the second milestone during the next two years of the Nine-Year Plan. The strategy being used is to strengthen the Waikato so that it becomes a reservoir cluster and will then be able to send capable tutors to other clusters and assist in the establishment of a junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. A need for pioneers has been identified as a means for strengthening this cluster.

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## Area Teaching Committees

During 180 B.E., the Regional Bahá'í Council in collaboration with the Regional Institute Board hosted two Area Teaching Committee and Coordination Seminars. The first of these was in August 2023 and looked at the collection and analysis of statistics, as well as accompanying groups of families and planning. In February 2024 the programme looked at the relationship between social action and teaching, the use of Ruhi Book 2, and working with collaborators. For the year ahead, the Regional Council looks to learn more, alongside the Area Teaching Committees, about building networks of collaborators that can extend the reach of the Area Teaching Committee and support its functioning. At a regional level, the Council is deepening its understanding of the timely formation and effective accompaniment of Area Teaching Committees. A more recent development which has strengthened two Area Teaching Committees is the regular meeting of the Hawke's Bay and Wellington Area Teaching Committees and the regional development facilitator for the study of Book 10.3. This study space has recently been joined by a third Area Teaching Committee—Waikato. This system for connecting Area Teaching Committees is one the Council will develop further next year, so that each Area Teaching Committee is connected to a system for sharing learning.

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## Dissemination of Learning

What are the strategies for sharing the learning around groups of families?

- Organising specific meetings where learning can be disseminated, once each cycle
- Engaging a core group of individuals from within the nucleus in periodic reflection with others on a similar learning path; e.g., Waikato and Hawke's Bay
- Core groups from within a nucleus visiting a more advanced cluster for an extended period, attending gatherings organised in that cluster for reflection, or participating in online spaces with friends from that cluster
- Meeting with related institutions (e.g., Auxiliary Board members, regional institute coordinators, the Regional Institute Board) to map out what currently exists and to plan next steps for each of the clusters that are actively working with groups of families: Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Waikato, and Wellington
- Using written and video narratives. Three new narratives were written: Pā Harakeke/Flaxmere, Te Awamutu, and Paraparamu.

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## Pioneering / deputisation of friends for service

There has been some movement, especially of youth, around the region this year. However, while there have been expressions of interest, there has been no settlement of homefront pioneers. The Aotearoa Pioneering Task Force has been raising the profile of homefront pioneering, especially in the most advanced cluster and neighbourhoods—"It is anticipated," the House of Justice states in its call for pioneers dated 24 May 2022, "that these friends would come from stronger clusters".

Conversely, the Council has seen an increasing need for friends to give more time to serving in their neighbourhoods or clusters, which sometimes entails a need for financial support. This has been an area of learning for the Council this past year as it collaborates with Auxiliary Board members, the Regional Institute Board and Assemblies to determine needs and funding streams.

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## Working with Assemblies

This past year, the Regional Bahá'í Council decided to hold some of its in-person meetings in different clusters. This practice has been felt to be very successful. The goal of this decision was to enable the Council to be closer to the community's grassroots and to build relationships with Local Spiritual Assemblies. The Council typically spends a weekend consulting together in a host community, which can include field visits and sharing a meal with the members of the local Assemblies, nuclei, and/or cluster agencies.

In 180 B.E., the clusters visited were Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Triumph, and Waikato. Two of those are currently second (moving to the third) milestone clusters, while the other two are advanced clusters in Te Ika-a-Māui/the North Island. Being able to visit these communities and consult and engage in whakawhanaungatanga with the Local Spiritual Assemblies has been a way for the Council to more swiftly distill and disseminate the learning from the advanced clusters to those at an earlier stage along the continuum of growth.

The Nine Year Plan "calls for an expanded vision, a nuanced understanding of coexisting imperatives, added flexibility, and heightened institutional collaboration" (30 December 2021 message). Partly due to these actions and associated learnings, the Council is putting a system in place which will enable it to meet and collaborate with secretaries of Assemblies around growth.



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## Summer School

Following a wish expressed by many people from around the country, as conveyed by multiple delegates at the National Convention, the National Spiritual Assembly warmly responded in declaring that the nation's first sub-regional summer schools would be held during the 2023–2024 summer months. It assigned responsibility of planning and support to the Regional Bahá'í Councils, which expanded the capacities and strengthened the relationships of many institutions across the motu.

The success of the summer schools was owing to collaboration among many institutions: the National Spiritual Assembly, the North Island Regional Bahá'í Council, the Regional Institute Board, the host Assemblies, and te Rōpū Kura Raumati.

In the North Island, six summer schools were held: two in Auckland, one in Whangārei, one near Hamilton, one in Masterton, and a Kura Raumati at Pāpāwai Marae near Greytown. The Council was deeply impressed by the commitment, dedication, and hard work of the host Assemblies chosen by the National Assembly and their collaborators. All summer schools followed the same programme, which included video presentations, study and consultation material, and artistic activities. Facilitators chosen by host Assemblies attended training sessions hosted by the Regional Council weeks in advance of the first summer school. Hundreds of Bahá'ís and friends from the wider community attended these summer schools.



Photo of the Kura Raumati, held at Pāpāwae Marae in Greytown, December 2023.



A presentation by some of the children at the Karapiro summer School, hosted by the Hamilton Assembly, December 2023



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Excerpts from a few of the narratives

***“Manurewa is involved in the most advanced learning in the country, and one of the regional team members is from this area. During these online meetings [with nuclei and focus neighbourhoods], they share valuable insights about working with groups of families, which are part of the flow of learning from advanced clusters to the rest of the region.”***

***Te Tomo: “The Te Awamutu nucleus maintains a consistent focus on engaging the wider community within the neighbourhoods. Their efforts extend beyond their core activities, emphasising the importance of building true friendships. For example, their World Conference was held on a local marae with whānau and neighbourhood connections, and Waipa has hosted small, local summer schools that families and neighbours have been invited to.”***

***Pā Harakeke: “It’s quicker, more intense, it’s Māori to work whānau-based. The Nine Year Plan really works with the culture. Culturally, we already have whānau day: we are matching them.”***

***Paraparaumu: “The positive dynamics of the collective discourse is leading to more families joining the group and supporting the pattern of action. They are continually interacting and consulting and a new object of learning is taking shape as they ‘become more conscious of social, economic, or cultural barriers that are impeding people’s spiritual and material progress’ (30 December 2021 message from the House of Justice).”***



Regional Book 6 intensive for summer initiative orientation, Te Poho Marae, Napier, December 2023.



Regional institutional meeting at the Manurewa Bahá’í Centre.

# North Island Regional Institute

## Ngā Huihuinga Akoranga o Te Ika a Maui

**“Increasingly, participation in institute courses is preparing the friends of God for an ever-deeper engagement in the life of the wider community...” - Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021**

### Enhancing the quality of the educational experience

*“With respect to raising the capacity of institutes to deliver each of the three stages of the educational process, we are glad to see that attention is increasingly being given to enhancing the quality of the educational experience itself, in addition to expanding the system for its delivery. A critical requirement is to enable all those contributing to the work of the institute to progressively advance their understanding of the educational content: its objectives, its structure, its pedagogical principles, its methodology, its central concepts, its interconnections.”*

- Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021

### Programme for the spiritual education of children (PSEC)

The regional PSEC educational team of the training institute has refined its objects of learning to align with the expansive view of the institute process that the Universal House of Justice is asking us to take in this Nine Year Plan. One aspect of this is learning how the Programme for the spiritual education of children can become more formalised and seen as the entry point of a seamless educational process that has a constant flow into it and which is sustained by a growing team of resident teachers. More emphasis has been placed on ensuring new teachers are trained and that teachers are provided with training in Grade after Grade to keep up with the needs of children progressing through the programme. In the past year, there has been a growing number of children who have had the opportunity to complete Grade 3, 4 and 5 before graduating to the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme.



Junior youth camp for participants from Hawke's Bay, Tairāwhiti, Ōpōtiki and Palmerston North, Te Poho Marae, Napier

The coordinators and collaborators across North Island are also more closely following how the content of Book 3 (and grade training) has a profound impact on the thoughts, attitudes, habits and behaviour of the children and teachers themselves. One insight has been, that teachers arranging themselves into teams is indispensable to sustaining their service to the programme and to giving more attention to the quality of the educational experience, as well as its expansion. The regular study of the document 'Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning' is also enabling teachers and others serving the programme to shift from a mode of running isolated activities, into a forward-thinking process of building community and capacity for service through an ever-expanding program for the spiritual education of children. The 'Training Institutes' document provides a clear vision of the continuum along which teams of teachers and families can advance.



Junior youth art project during a camp in Auckland, September 2023

With the release of Ruhi book 12.2 An Expanding Conversation on the Education of Children, neighbourhoods and nuclei are learning about implementing the study in their localities to contribute to the unfolding conversations with families at the grassroots. The PSEC educational team is following how the content and nature of these conversations are contributing to the vibrancy, scale and sustainability of the programme for the spiritual education of children. One space in which these conversations take on greater depth and are fostered is at family camps. Manurewa (Auckland) and Paraparaumu (Wellington) neighbourhoods have been hosting these regularly and an expanding number of families are becoming connected to the process of society building.



## Junior youth spiritual empowerment programme (JYSEP)

Inspired by the insights gained from the training institute gathering of our geographic zone in March 2023, the collaborative group – supporting the work of the training institute – met in June to continue the conversations about the merit of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. Together they studied the branch course 'Initial Impulse' and documents prepared by the International Teaching Centre, to help explore two broad realities: a) Engaging 50 to 100 participants through the study of three texts, b) Engaging 300 participants through the study of some 10 texts.

This focus helped to appreciate the complexity of working on concurrent lines of action in different settings. Some friends now needing to follow the frontiers of learning on how to engage 300+ junior youth in the Auckland cluster, while there is still much work to be done to establish capacities related to engaging 50 to 100 junior youth in Hawke's Bay, Tairāwhiti, Wellington and other clusters to follow. Each of these three clusters has a junior youth coordinator, so connecting with the ongoing learning process becomes more systematic.

Auckland launched this vision of engaging 300 junior youth in July 2023. By the end of the following cycle, 59 junior youth had completed a junior youth text at one of five junior youth camps held across the cluster. 18 animators accompanied the junior youth, six of these animators were building capacity to animate for the first time. Many friends lent support – offering their time to cook, providing transport and financial support, running art and other activities, and assisting animators to study the text with junior youth. During this time two more junior youth completed their 10th text taking the total to 21 junior youth in Auckland that have completed more than 10 junior youth texts.

November was dedicated to training of Book 5 Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth tutors, who were then accompanied to tutor Book 5 at institute camps in January. The community rallied again to host another six junior youth camps, facilitated by 18 animators, with a total participation of 82 junior youth. For two junior youth this meant they completed all 14 junior youth texts currently available.



Regional animator gathering, October 2023

Four junior youth groups from Avondale and Manurewa neighbourhoods graduated from the junior youth programme into the main sequence at the end of the year which was celebrated with two ceremonies. They then were part of a large intake of 23 youth into Book 1 Reflections on the Life of the Spirit through the January Ruhi camps and many junior youth graduates also attended the youth conference that was held in early January. Efforts are underway to run a '300 junior youth campaign' during the March/April expansion phase to start new groups and expand existing groups to achieve Auckland's cluster goal, of engaging 300 junior youth in the programme.

Hawke's Bay launched its 50-100 campaign early December 2023, when the animators from Pā Harakeke (Flaxmere neighbourhood in Hastings) met to study and consult using the 50-100 Office of Social and Economic Development document on how to best utilise the summer break to visit families of existing junior youth and others who attended previously. Over a 5-day expansion period they came together each afternoon to pray and consult and identified 90 junior youth. Daily home visits, devotional gatherings and park outings created opportunities for many conversations with junior youth and their families about the 3-year programme.

They visited 33 homes and had over 70 conversations throughout the campaign. This resulted in six new junior youth who attended the January camp and 15 registrations to join the weekly junior youth groups starting again in February 2024. The focus now is to sustain the 51 junior youth in the weekly groups in Pā Harakeke, with four animators serving full-time and two co-animating.

A further two junior youth groups run the programme weekly across the cluster with 15 participants – bringing the cluster total to 66 junior youth in the programme.

## Regional Animator Seminars

Two regional animator seminars were held in April and October, bringing together some 60 participants each time. These spaces have become part of the annual calendar and raise capacity in current animators and in those who wish to serve as animators to offer the junior youth programme with increasing effectiveness.



Regional animator seminar, October 2023

## New Junior Youth Materials

A new junior youth text was made available in October 2023 – *Rays of Light* – a distinctly Bahá'í text, that explores through the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá certain fundamental principles of His Father's Faith that serve to illuminate humanity's path.

In February 2024 a final guide was added to "Guide to Texts I", the second unit of *Initial Impulse*—the first branch course of Book 5. This unit now includes, for study by animators, a review of each of the five Bahá'í-inspired texts that, along with *Breezes of Confirmation*, are generally intended to be taken up by junior youth groups during their first year together:

*Wellspring of Joy, Habits of an Orderly Mind, Glimmerings of Hope, Walking the Straight Path, and On Health and Well-Being*

## Main Sequence of Courses

In April 2023 the new edition of Book 6 *Teaching the Cause* was published, followed by book 7 *Walking Together on a Path of Service*, end of February 2024. This completes the first cycle – Books 1 to 7 – of the main sequence of courses now publicly available on ruhi.org.

A nine-day orientation was held in the Hawke's Bay cluster in early December for this year's summer initiative. Through the in-depth study of Book 6 some 20 participants explored concepts of "enkindlement", and how the complementarity of "being" and "doing" is manifested in practical terms in the field of service. They built capacity to deliver concepts of Anna's presentation and actively practice this in pre-arranged homevisits. Participants left the orientation transformed, and two felt moved to declare their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh. The atmosphere was really special, allowing many to recognise the spiritual forces that are released when teaching directly and how that impacts our acts of service.

Some participant reflections:

*-When you do this book [Book 6], it just doesn't feel right to sit idle, you WANT TO TEACH.*

*-A highlight was the opportunity to grow our individual friendships, to grow closer as servants of God walking this path.*

*-I learnt how to teach, and some of the quotes about the Concourse on High really touched my heart. I also learnt you need to prepare before a home visit.*

*-The opportunity we have here in this mortal realm to simply take the first step. We will be guided by the Concourse on High with plans in place and ready to assist us. It puts it into perspective how silly it almost is for us not to try and teach.*

*-I loved the beautiful souls I was fortunate to learn with and from. And the amazing new songs to add to our collection.*

*-I used to think that I should only bring up Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to people who seem receptive, but, really, sharing the beautiful Teachings is actually a strong source of creating receptivity itself.*

*-My highlight was being with a group of beautiful souls, all eager to learn. And seeing the logical flow of concepts in Anna's presentation.*

## Content Seminars

This past year saw the educational seminars moving closer to the grassroots. Drawing deeply on Books 1 and 2 and exploring its objectives, structure, pedagogical principles, methodology, central concepts, and interconnections, was the focus of a group of tutors in Waikato, in a two-day seminar in May 2023. Following on from another such space arranged with tutors serving in the Manurewa neighbourhood earlier.

Seeing the value of working with a team of tutors from within a local or cluster setting was very encouraging, as lessons learned, and insights gained could be applied directly in practice. More cluster and neighbourhood level content seminars are planned.

The experience also highlighted that rather than producing a tutor guide that shows the interconnections of Book 1 with other courses, the actual time spent together to look at the content deeply and explore it through the lens of paragraph 23 of the 30 December 2021 message, enabled each participant to connect with the purpose of each unit, gain a deeper appreciation of the significance of the role of the tutor, and the importance of expanding the institute's delivery.



A long term service project sustained in collaboration with local Manurewa youth and The Beautification Trust

## Book 11 'Material Means' campaign

This campaign was launched in March 2023 with the goal of engaging some 50% of the youth and adult Bahá'í population in the study of Book 11 Material Means. The first unit covers "Giving: The Spiritual Basis of Prosperity", the second unit is about "The Institution of the Fund" and the third unit, which was released late May, covers "The Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh".

Two cycles into the campaign, in October 2023, completion numbers for the North Island almost doubled! 207 individuals completed the first unit, 107 had progressed through unit 2 and 22 completed unit 3. Over 40 friends have served as tutors in this campaign.

Numbers are still being finalised, but as of the writing of this report (end of February), another 24 friends have completed unit 1 (+85 in progress), 18 completed unit 2 (+87 in progress), and 35 completed unit 3 (+89 in progress). Which brings us to roughly 20% of our youth and adult population.



Some friends in the Waikato region who completed Book 11, Unit 3 via Zoom, October 2023



A group of youth from Manurewa study 'The power of the holy spirit' junior youth text as well as Ruhi Book 1



# Enhancing the capacity of the Institute itself

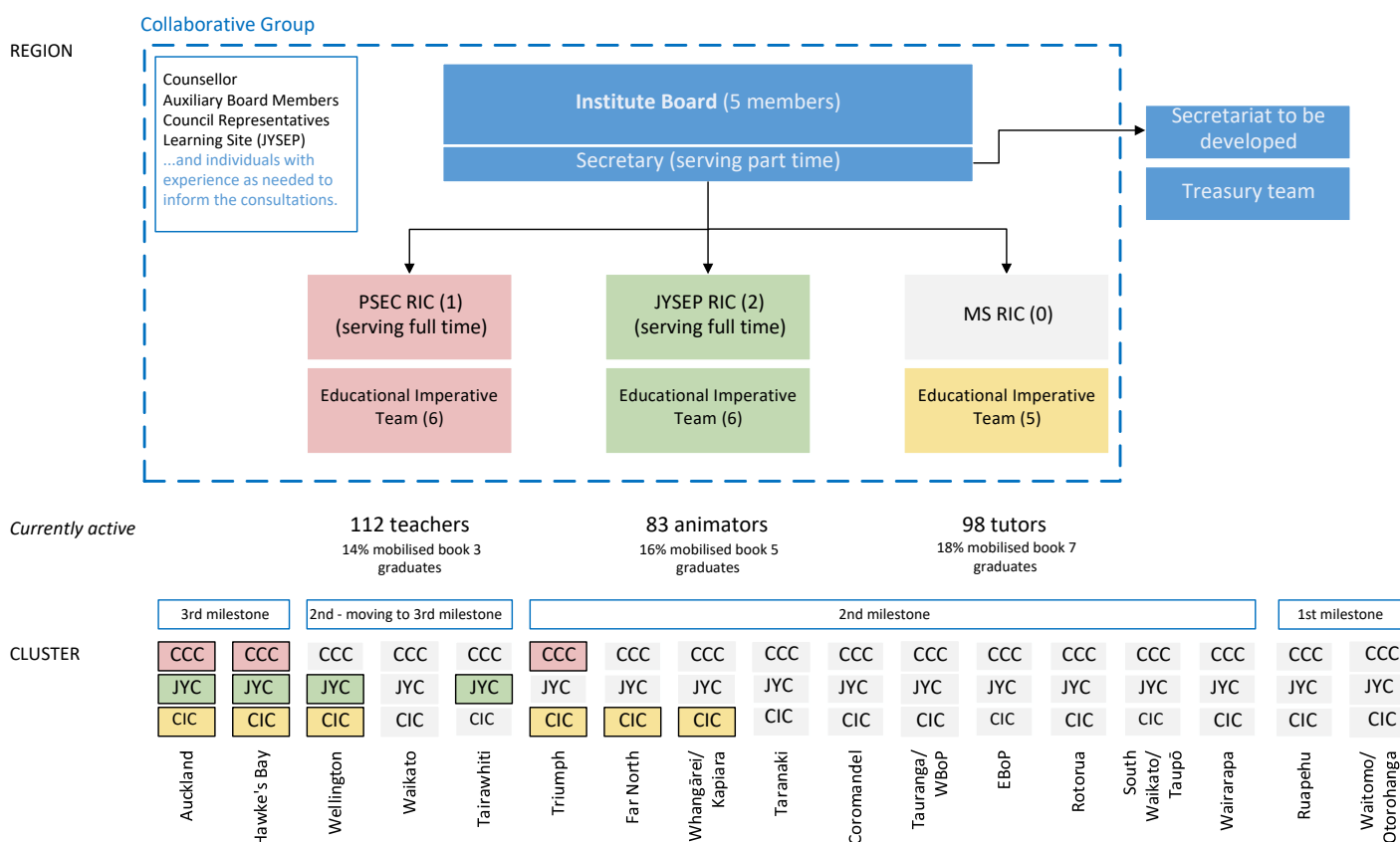
“...ensuring that training institutes are able to offer spiritual education in a manner sufficient to meet growing demands will require the involvement of some full-time, thoughtful, and far-sighted individuals, particularly at the regional level, who are capable of guiding the sound evolution of an educational organization over an extended period of time.”

- 20 March 2023 letter written by the Department of the Secretariat to a National Spiritual Assembly

## Schemes of coordination

For the training institute to become more systematic and sustain learning processes underway, the scheme of coordination across the region and clusters needs to progressively be strengthened. While many friends have arisen to serve as coordinators for the three educational imperatives in their clusters, many more still need to follow. The institute is working to further formalise roles of cluster coordinators to set clear expectations and understand the path of development for someone to be ready to take on this role for generally a two-year term.

### Training Institute of the North Island of New Zealand



As at 22 March 2024

## Safeguarding the interests of young people

A branch course for Safeguarding the Interests of Young People was released in August 2023 – “Reflecting on our endeavours”. This now enables the 2-yearly ‘refresher’ people will need to take to stay accredited, after they have completed the full safeguarding course. It provides an opportunity for individuals and teams to reflect on their experience with implementing the safeguarding processes in their communities, and to further strengthen their understanding of the safeguarding principles and processes. There are over 30 trained facilitators of the programme across the North Island.

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## Social Action

*“The initial stirrings of grassroots social action begin to be seen in a cluster as the availability of human resources increases and capacity for a wider range of tasks develops. Villages have proven to be notably fertile ground from which social action initiatives have emerged and been sustained, but in urban settings too, friends living there have succeeded in carrying out activities and projects suited to the social environment, at times by working with local schools, agencies of civil society, or even government bodies. Social action is being undertaken in a number of important fields, including the environment, agriculture, health, the arts, and particularly education. Over the course of the Nine Year Plan, and especially as the study of specific institute courses stimulates greater activity in this area, we expect to see a proliferation of formal and informal efforts to promote the social and economic development of a people.”*

- Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021

In December 2023 a group of four friends from the North Island and three from the South Island joined a Social Action Seminar in Sydney organised by the Regional Baha’i Council of South Eastern Australia. Unit 1 of Book 13 Engaging in Social Action – Stirrings at the Grassroots was studied whilst drawing on practical examples of social action projects across the geographical zone. Some of the themes studied were: How the institute process creates conditions for social action, the scale of social action spanning from initial stirrings to short term and simple projects to more sustained and complex, the evolution of the Bahá’í International Development Organisation, the framework within which social action takes place, how the capacity of a population to read its own social reality is embedded in social action, and how Local Assemblies can foster social action projects and steer away pitfalls. Many examples illuminated the participants’ understanding of social action. By looking at social action from a new lens with new understanding we begin to see how it is part of one unified endeavour with expansion and consolidation (building vibrant communities) and participation in social discourse. Much attention was given to how we can learn to identify and describe social action at the grassroots; the conditions or culture that give rise to it and the implications/social transformation that comes from it.

The first plenary session during the February 2024 Coordination Seminar was dedicated to the theme of social action and helped relay some of the insights gained from the Sydney seminar. The participants studied sections 6 & 7 of Book 13.1 to gain an increased understanding of how the institute process fosters conditions for social action.



Group photo of the friends gathered at the Social Action seminar in Sydney, December 2023



Social Action Seminar, December 2023



Friends gather at the House of Worship in Sydney during the Social Action Seminar, December 2023

# Aotearoa Pioneering Taskforce

## Te Ohu Whakatau Rāwaho o Aotearoa

**“...The 24 May message...not only calls for settling international pioneers, but also anticipates a significant movement of homefront pioneers to assist with establishing programmes of growth in thousands of clusters.”**  
***From the Universal House of Justice, to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand - 24 May 2022.***

### Report

The Pioneering Taskforce continues to focus on New Zealand's pioneer goals alongside endeavours to raise both the awareness of pioneering and the financial support of pioneers as a sacred responsibility and a unique opportunity for service.

The challenge in establishing a process for the selection, identification and deployment of pioneers has demanded constant attention and creative and flexible thinking. While there is not yet a large pool of friends ready to be selected and matched with a homefront region or international goal, there has been small but steady interest, particularly from those friends who have already tasted the elixir of pioneering.

Insights derived from global experience in deploying international pioneers in the last series of plans has guided identification of potential pioneers for New Zealand's goals. One such insight is that pioneers are most effective when they have gained significant experience in wielding the instruments and methods of the Plans and have developed the capabilities required to raise and support an expanding nucleus of individuals serving with intensity.

Finding a balance between the willingness of such capable friends and the potential impact of their departure on the health and sustainability of progress in their home community has been a significant challenge. Managing unforeseen issues with visas, health and the need for deputisation has also been a source of learning for the task force.

Along with the pioneers themselves, we have needed to understand and navigate the international immigration procedures which have hampered the friends from being able to swiftly reach their pioneer posts and be sure of visa extension. Despite these challenges two of New Zealand's three international goals were fulfilled during 180 B.E. (French Polynesia -Yvonne Williamson and Michael Vaughan from Ōpōtiki; and Cook Islands - Ella Taufelege from Auckland and her husband Danesha originally from Waikato). In lieu of being unable to identify two youth or a young couple for the Czech Republic city of Brno, two independent Auckland friends (Suzanne Kerr and Soheil Ighani) have arisen to offer short term service to Brno between April and July 2024. There remains an urgent need for at least one, preferably two youth or a young couple to pioneer to Brno, Czech Republic.

As a third milestone cluster, Auckland was initially given the responsibility of raising and deploying pioneers, however a significant response has come from outside Auckland and the task force has looked for ways to build capacity and provide experience with intense programmes of growth for a wider pool of friends whose hearts are calling them to the pioneering field.

As for homefront pioneering efforts; we would like to report that two capable Auckland families did arise to pioneer and have now successfully settled in Invercargill. We can now focus on other goal areas in the South Island. Furthermore, now that two homefront pioneering families have arisen to serve the international goal of French Polynesia, both Ōpōtiki and Rotorua require urgent attention. In the short term, Ehsan Mohebbi (Auckland ) has been paying regular visits to support community-building activities in Ōpōtiki and Lau Lu Tuakoi (Auckland) has pledged to pioneer there in a few months' time.

Currently expressions of interest have been received by 3 other Aucklanders and two regional families but not for deployment in the immediate future.



Michael Vaughan and Yvonne Williamson visit Manaia, Whangārei Heads prior to departing for French Polynesia



The third International pioneer goal for New Zealand is the city of Brno in the Czech Republic.



# Office of Public Affairs

## Te Tari Take Tūmatanui

**The Office of Public Affairs coordinates and leads the New Zealand Bahá'í Community's interaction with wider society on the national stage**

### Introduction

The Office of Public Affairs is an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly which is tasked with increasing the range and depth of the Bahá'í community's contributions to the life of society at the level of thought in social spaces on the national level. To achieve this objective, the Office has four areas of responsibility:

- Contributing to public discourse on the national stage
- Developing relationships with government and civil society
- Building relationships with the media
- Strengthening the New Zealand Bahá'í Community's presence on the web

The attention focused on these areas of work depends on the availability and level of experience of our human resources and the opportunities to advance these components of the work.

The Office expresses its gratitude to the beloved National Spiritual Assembly for dedicating a whole weekend in November 2023 to a public affairs seminar, and subsequently setting clear priorities for the Office during a period of transition. We gratefully acknowledge the National Secretary, Suzanne Mahon, who has worked closely with the Office and been a constant source of encouragement and guidance.

We wish to convey our sincere appreciation to many believers who have worked with the Office over the past year and enabled the learning and progress summarised below. A remarkable feature of the past year is what was achieved across New Zealand with limited support from the Office, in particular, the capacity of institutions and individuals to hold moving 'Our Story Is One' events honouring the ten women executed in Shiraz in June 1983.

We also acknowledge the many individuals who contribute to discourses at the international, national, regional and local level through their work, without any connection to the Office. We do not underestimate the value of individuals contributing to a wide array of discourses through their profession or occupation.

### Transition period

During the year, the Office lost the immensely valuable services of Aidan MacLeod who had significantly advanced the Bahá'í community's contribution to national discourses. Paddy Payne had planned to transition from being a coordinator to being a collaborator during the year. Fortunately, he agreed to mentor the Office's two new coordinators, Sandra Paymani and Maria Reynen Clayton, until May 2024. Maria had worked with the Office as a collaborator with responsibilities for the defence of the Bahá'ís before this appointment. Sandra had been employed as the Race Unity Speech Awards (RUSA) programme manager before her appointment. The new coordinators have found that RUSA and the defence of Bahá'ís can absorb an enormous amount of their time, which has limited participation in public discourse.

To support this transition in the Office, the National Spiritual Assembly helped to plan and attended a weekend seminar on public affairs with the Office and key collaborators. Given the limited experience and the existing responsibilities of the two coordinators, the National Spiritual Assembly advised them to deepen their engagement in the discourse on race relations, and to look for opportunities for religious communities and youth to contribute to national discourses on race relations and social inclusion.

This year the Office had the privilege of two online meetings with Saba Detweiler of the Office of Public Discourse. In the first meeting, Saba assisted the Office and National Spiritual Assembly representatives with the planning of the weekend seminar. During the second meeting focused on the Office of Public Affairs' annual plan, she shared how Offices around the world navigate discourses in highly politicized environments. The Office thinks regular quarterly meetings with Saba hold immense value in building our capacity.

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## Contributing to public discourse on the national stage

*“Efforts to participate in discourses on the national stage are increasingly coming to form the centrepiece of the work undertaken by Offices of External Affairs throughout the world.”*

*- National and International External Affairs Endeavours of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community, a paper prepared by and Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, October 2014*

In the past year, the Office has continued to contribute to national discourses on:

- race relations and social cohesion
- the role of religion in society, and
- the role of youth in society.

Some of the contributions that Office made to public discourse in the past year brought more than one of these discourses together, as noted below in the highlights of discourse activities.

### **Race Unity Hui 2023 – race relations, role of youth**

As in previous years, the Office held a national hui on race relations based on the topic of the 2023 Race Unity Speech Awards (Awhihia te rito – Nurture the young). The Hui content was developed by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (now known as Mana Mokopuna) and they took the lead in the facilitation as well. A relatively small number attended the Hui component of the day, approximately 12 rangatahi plus facilitators, the adult group was approximately 30 including facilitators.

2023 saw three regional hui take place, in Hamilton, Rotorua and Taranaki, engaging 98 participants in total. There were other opportunities for rangatahi to participate in discourse on race relations. On the 17th of July the National Champion, Esther Sovincet, captivated her audience of 40 RTLBs (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) with her exceptional speech at a teacher-only day for the Tuawhito o Akarana RTLB Cluster in Auckland. Subsequently, on the 22nd of July semi-finalist, Lena Ormsby, presented her stirring speech in front of no less than 250 delegates at a Māori Tamil Hui organised by the Aotearoa NZ Federation of Tamil Sangams in Auckland. Additionally, on the 1st of September, Hamilton's Regional Champion presented her thought-provoking speech at the launch of Welcoming Week in the presence of Mayor Paula Southgate, various city council officials, plus a captive audience of at least 120 people. The momentum continued to build on the 21st of September where selected rangatahi, Esther Sovincet, Taila Luani, reduced some of their audience to tears with their speeches at a Ministry of Education Diversity Symposium to another group of 15 secondary school teachers.

## Supporting youth engagement on the National Action Plan Against Racism – role of youth, race relations

The National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) is a document setting out New Zealand’s goals, objectives and action for eradicating racial prejudice and injustice. One of the previous Office coordinators served on this committee in 2022, alongside leading youth workers with experience supporting young people to deal with racism in its various forms. A follow-up from this work was initiated by Mana Mokopuna (MM) at the RUSA national hui in June. MM asked to develop and facilitate the national hui content for the purpose of hearing rangatahi voices, in particular relation to the root cause of racism and solutions. This further aided the ongoing work of NAPAR.

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## Relations with government and civil society

*“The immediate objective of steps taken to build relations with members and sections of government, as well as with individuals and groups operating in the sphere of civil society, is to strengthen the presence of the Bahá'í community on the national stage and thus enhance its capacity to allow the light of the Faith’s teachings to be shed on an increasing number of discussions concerned with social progress.”*

*- National and International External Affairs Endeavours of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community, a paper prepared by and Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, October 2014*

During the year, the Office organised online learning and reflection spaces about building relationships with Members of Parliament. In November, the Office asked Local Spiritual Assemblies to arrange for meeting with MPs, and suggested an approach based on learning from experience about building relationships with MPs. The Office is looking forward to more reports from Local Spiritual Assemblies about these meetings. Our other efforts to building relations with government and civil society focus on people and organisations active in the discourses on race relations and social inclusion; the role of religion in society; and the role of youth in society. This focus is necessary to achieve coherence in our work and to grow our capacity to influence thought.

In addition to the discourse spaces mentioned above, the Office, its collaborators and Bahá'í representatives participated in the following national spaces to build relationships and contribute to discourse.

- National Assembly member Marc Rivers served as a Trustee for the Religious Diversity Centre (RDC). The RDC’s capacity to facilitate productive interfaith

dialogue was evident during meetings it hosted with the Ministry of Ethnic Communities to consider how to address the mental anguish experienced by individuals, families and communities impacted by the Israel / Gaza war, ruptures to relationships between the affected communities and a rise in social media abuse and threats. OPA coordinators attended the online meetings.

- Suzanne Mahon participated in the twice-yearly meetings of religious leaders organised by the RDC.
- Nizar Mohamed has advised RDC members on how faith communities could support climate change resilience.
- Bahá'ís across the country continue to support interfaith councils and to sustain close relationships with representatives and members of other faiths. In Dunedin and Palmerston North, Bahá'ís provide leadership on these councils. The Office received reports this year from Bahá'ís in the Hawke's Bay and Auckland about interfaith activities, and understands that Bahá'ís in Taranaki, Christchurch, Nelson, Wellington and Waikato are actively engaged. The Office invited friends involved in interfaith councils to study Ruhi Book 14 on contributing to discourse.
- Office representatives have been invited by government Ministers to the Beehive to celebrate national events such as Lunar New Year and Commonwealth Day.
- The Office works with other governmental and civil society organisations through organising the Race Unity Speech Awards and Conference, including the Human Rights Commission, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Te Taura Whiri I te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission), Speech NZ, Office of the Children's Commissioner, NZ National Commission for UNESCO, Manukau Institute of Technology, the NZ Federation of Multicultural Councils and Multiethnic Young Leaders Network.
- A strong relationship continues with the NZ Police, firmly founded on their involvement in and sponsorship of the Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui.
- The Inclusive Aotearoa Collective (IAC) is an NGO focused on bringing together social actors to work towards making New Zealand a more inclusive society. One of the Office's previous collaborators participated in regular meetings with IAC. We see IAC as an organisation we would like to continue to work with.

## Efforts to defend the Bahá'í community from persecution

*“An adjunct to this area of work is the defence of the Bahá'í community. Regrettably, in a few countries around the world, Bahá'ís continue to face serious opposition, the aim of which is the suppression of their individual and collective endeavours and, in the case of Iran, the elimination of the Bahá'í community itself as a viable entity.”*

*- National and International External Affairs Endeavours of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community, a paper prepared by and Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, October 2014*

Our Office leads and coordinates efforts to ensure that our government is fully informed about violation of the basic rights of the Bahá'í citizens of Iran and other countries.

- The Office shared the regular bulletins from the Bahá'í International Community (BIC) on the persecution of Bahá'ís, and other information, with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).
- Office representatives met five times with MFAT officials. These meetings are part of the BIC's international coordination of engagement with governments prior to resolutions about human rights in Iran being considered by the United Nations in New York or the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The New Zealand government remained active in defence of the Bahá'ís, co-sponsoring as well as voting in favour of resolutions.
- New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nanaia Mahuta, was the first foreign minister to post a social media statement supporting the 'Our Story Is One' campaign.

The effort to gain media coverage about the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran is considered later, in Relations with the Media.

The Office was asked by the BIC to engage in several international campaigns to raise awareness of the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran. The Office and its collaborators had the capacity only for the 'Our Story Is One' campaign. The response to this campaign in New Zealand is a testament to how the hanging of ten women in Shiraz for refusing to recant their Faith continues to touch the hearts of Bahá'ís.



The 'Our Story Is One' campaign was launched with little advance notice because of the complexities of the context in Iran. The BIC sought guidance from the Universal House of Justice as it developed the 'Our Story Is One' strategy. In July - August 2022 the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran had intensified. Weeks later the death in custody of Mahsa Amini led to widespread protests. As the government suppressed the protests, the human right violations experienced by Bahá'ís in Iran were being experienced by Iranians supporting the protests. It was essential to not further jeopardise the Bahá'ís community in Iran, but the silence of Bahá'ís about the protests had increased the perception that Bahá'ís were indifferent to the aspirations and suffering of the Iranian people. The 'Our Story Is One' campaign connected the execution of ten Bahá'í women to the violations of the rights of those making sacrifices for gender equality and justice. The 'Our Story Is One' message has shifted public opinion in Iran. For example, 150 leaders in Iran and numerous influential figures in the Iranian diaspora have publicly condemned the Iranian government's actions against Bahá'ís.

Public events were held in Christchurch, Auckland, Nelson, the Far North, Napier and Taupō. The Christchurch Assembly agreed to host a national memorial event in June. It featured dramatic presentations about how Bahá'ís have worked to raise the status of women in Iran since the early days of the Faith, and new songs composed by Grant Hindin Miller and Sonbol Taefi. Friends in Auckland, Christchurch and Napier secured media coverage and others obtained social media statements for the online campaign. These activities illustrated the depth of talent and creativity in the Bahá'í community, and what successes could be achieved by determined, dedicated friends rallying and organising others to contribute. We think it is possible that these experiences have increased the confidence of the friends to undertake such work and sharpened their understanding of how to build relationships with government and civil society.

The Auckland Spiritual Assembly, the Office and Iranian Women in New Zealand (IWIN) are sponsoring the 'Our Story Is One' art exhibition in Auckland, from 19 to 30 March. The exhibition organisers have been on a steep learning curve, guided by the advice of Dame Robin White, Jessica Robinson, Shirin Khosraviani, and Bahá'ís working in the media and public relations. A key objective has been building relationships with civil society and articulating how Bahá'ís approach social change.

A webinar about human rights in Iran was organised by the Office and collaborators in December 2023. It attracted and informed members of the wider community. The panellists were Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Iraj Kamalabadi, advocate for prisoners of conscience in Iran; Golriz Ghahraman, Former UN lawyer and then New Zealand Member of Parliament.



This month marks 40 years since the tragic execution of 10 Baha'i women in Iran for their belief in justice and equality

Their story echoes in the resilient women of Iran who continue to make sacrifices in the path of gender equality

Join us for a  
**Twitter Storm on 18 June at 7:30pm - 9:30pm CET**  
 To honour them and all Iranian women,  
 from every faith and background.

Let us show that #OurStoryIsOne

Community

# Call for Creative content!

Join us in the #OurStoryIsOne campaign to celebrate the resilience of Iranian women of all faiths and backgrounds!

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## Relations with the media

*“Offices are not merely concerned with the refinement of techniques—for example, improving ways to share press releases or secure coverage for a given announcement, important though such skills are to the successful execution of various tasks. Of greater significance in terms of an Office’s substantive progress is the task of learning about identifying sections of the media who share a concern for the well-being of humanity and gradually cultivating relations with them, building mutual trust and respect and exchanging thoughts and ideas as part of a productive and evolving conversation.”*

*- National and International External Affairs Endeavours of the Worldwide Bahá’í Community, a paper prepared by and Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, October 2014*

For some years, relationships with the media have not been an area of focus for the Office because of resourcing constraints.

As in previous years, the Race Unity Speech Awards provided the Office with a valuable opportunity to build relations with the media. The Office contracted Mabel Muller from Radio NZ to take charge of press releases, social media and coverage of the Nationals weekend. We were unable to secure a spot on the ‘Breakfast’ show as our contact has moved on. However regional coverage was high, and one of our rangatahi had her experience of the speech awards aired on Te Karere. The 21st anniversary celebration was picked up by a national journalist, Kadambari Gladding. Her story appeared on Voices on Radio NZ, where she interviewed two students (past and present).

RUSA continues to be the most published aspect of the Office’s work, mainly at the regional level with media celebrating the successes of their local rangatahi. RUSA media coverage typically explores this significant national issue thoughtfully, and RUSA is also pitched as good news story. It helps that RUSA can afford a professional media liaison service because of the effective fundraising done by the Office.

The advice from the BIC is that Offices and its collaborators must build relationships with journalists to get coverage, and our experience bears this out. Individuals with personal connections had more success than the Office over the past year. For example, Khatereh Eghdamian organised interviews that resulted in a large article in Sunday Star Times about how and why Bahá’ís in Iran are persecuted. John Spurdle and Sama Hall arranged coverage in the Otago Daily Times about the ‘Our Story Is One’ campaign before the event in Christchurch. Rose Stiles wrote a long article about the Hawke’s Bay newspaper to invite the public to a memorial event.

Lachlan Villiganas’ connection with Negar Partow resulted in an hour-long interview about the persecution of Bahá’ís in Iran and the ‘Our Story Is One’ campaign with Khatereh Eghdamian and Maria Reynen Clayton. The video was shared with members of International Community of Iranian Academics.

The Office is asked by the BIC to share its press releases regarding the persecution of the Bahá’ís. With the assistance of Adrienne Jervis and the friends who agreed to be quoted, local angles were added to seven BIC press releases. One of these press releases was picked up. The Office has noticed that its press releases can prompt editors to pick up these stories from international news sources. For example, during the past year regional newspapers covered the passing of the United Nations resolution about human rights in Iran and the United States government’s resolution about human rights in Iran which condemned “the government's persecution of the Bahá’í minority.” The implications are that the Office should explore avenues for sharing localised versions of these stories online, and that relationships must also be built with editors of international news because the New Zealand’s media reliance on international sources will continue.

We acknowledge Mava Moayyed for her 10 March 2024 article in TV1 news online, Pax Assadi who gained extensive media coverage about the second season of ‘Raised by Refugees,’ Adel Salmanzadeh whose art exhibition was featured in the Gisborne newspaper and Golriz Gundry who wrote and delivered a TED talk on Tahirih. Their creativity and communication skills raised the profile of the Faith and awareness that Bahá’ís had to flee Iran.

The Office greatly appreciates the support of Bahá’ís working in the media who can advise the Office and collaborators on who and how to approach media programmes and journalists. Their advice is to build genuine relationships based on reciprocity. One of the Office coordinators attended a live podcast by an RNZ journalist which has helped form such a relationship.

## Strengthening the Bahá'í presence on the web

*“Taken as an opportunity to articulate the national Bahá'í community's history, activities, convictions, and aspirations, efforts to create or reinvigorate a website for the national Bahá'í community have proven a very fruitful early area of action for Offices of External Affairs of diverse backgrounds and experience.”*

- National and International External Affairs Endeavours of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community, a paper prepared by and Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, October 2014

The Office conceives of its efforts to strengthen the Bahá'í presence on the web in terms of two related areas:

1. Formal websites such as [www.bahai.org.nz](http://www.bahai.org.nz) and [www.raceunity.nz](http://www.raceunity.nz)
2. Social media

### Formal websites

The Office would like to stress the importance of a redevelopment of our national website. The Canadian Bahá'í community's website is an example of where we should be heading. Without a total revamp, we cannot make updates and keep it 'alive' and current. We currently rely on social media to share updates, which has obvious limitations.

At the request of the National Spiritual Assembly secretary, Sandra worked with Saia Tangifolau on the Waitaki Bahá'í Community website. The website had been originally written using AI, which resulted in language that was not conducive to its audience or conveying messages effectively. Over several weeks Sandra worked through the website making suggestions to Saia via email. Great consideration was made not to diminish the work that had been done by the community but rather to empower them to think about their audience and the purpose of the website. Making recommendations to ensure permission was sought for the use of photographs in the first instance, through to making the website user friendly and easy to obtain information. Most of the updates have since been made to the website and the recommendations were gratefully received.

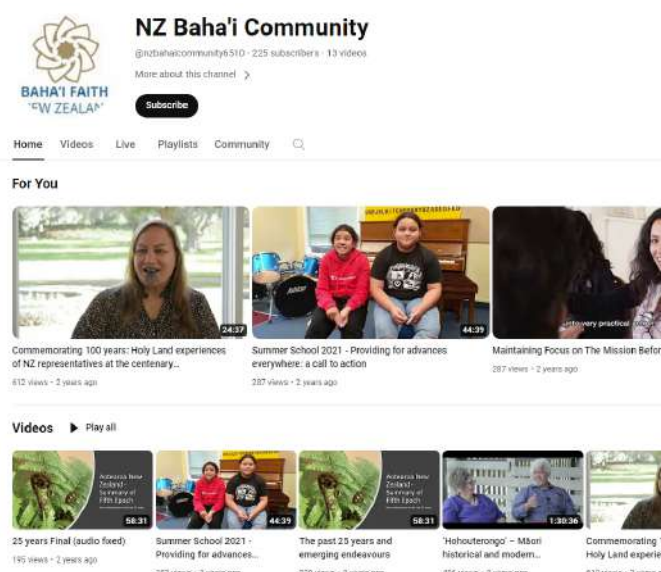
## Social media

The Office of Public Affairs also maintains and develops a suite of social media pages that form part of the Bahá'í community's presence on the web. These include:

- the Bahá'í community page on Facebook ([facebook.com/newzealandbahaicomunity](https://facebook.com/newzealandbahaicomunity))
- the Bahá'í community channel on YouTube ([youtube.com/channel/UC8ZUuWZNFm5ijF6KP39c\\_vbw](https://youtube.com/channel/UC8ZUuWZNFm5ijF6KP39c_vbw))
- the Race Unity Aotearoa Facebook page ([facebook.com/raceunityaotearoa](https://facebook.com/raceunityaotearoa))
- the Race Unity Aotearoa Instagram page ([instagram.com/raceunityaotearoa](https://instagram.com/raceunityaotearoa))
- the Race Unity Aotearoa TikTok page ([www.tiktok.com/@raceunityaotearoa](https://www.tiktok.com/@raceunityaotearoa))
- and the Race Unity YouTube channel ([youtube.com/raceunity](https://youtube.com/raceunity))

Improvements have been made to keep the social media engagement consistent throughout the year, showcasing events that take place after the speech awards rather than just the active lead up to the awards. The national final was livestreamed via YouTube and Facebook.

The Bahá'í community Facebook page has reached over 4000 followers whilst the Instagram page sits on 250. The Race Unity Facebook page has increased to 2500, and the Instagram page has almost 500. Most of our followers on all four of these platforms come from Auckland. We are in the process of establishing a TikTok presence for this year's Speech Awards.



Screenshot of the New Zealand Bahá'í community channel on YouTube



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## Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui

The Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui play an important role in the work of the Office by providing a vehicle to make a significant contribution to the discourse on race unity and ethnic diversity. They have allowed us to build strong relationships with government agencies and civil society organisations; they have contributed to our relationships with the media; and have led us to develop our presence on the web and on social media.

The Office would like to acknowledge the work of many dedicated individuals over the past 23 years who have made the Speech Awards and Hui what they are today.

### Speech Awards and Hui 2023

At the time of the last annual report, the 2023 Race Unity Speech Awards and Race Unity Hui were still in the planning stages – both events on the theme Awhiwhia Te Rito – Nurture the Young. Regional heats were held from 1 - 7 May, with the Nationals weekend on 17/18 June.

The 6 national finalists shared the following awards:

- Tohu Raukura ā-Motu – the NZ Police National Champion's Award: Esther Sovincet (Auckland)
- Tohu Māramatanga – the Bahá'í community Award for Insight: Ebony Kalin (Taranaki)
- Tohu Eke Panuku – the Human Rights Commission Award for Impact: Lena Ormsby (Hawke's Bay)
- Tohu Aumangea - the Hedi Moani Memorial Award for Advocacy: Gargi Vaidya (Central North Island)
- Tohu Whetumatarau – the Ministry for Ethnic Communities Award for Vision: Leo Mwape (Manawatu/Whanganui)
- Tohu Manaakitanga – Manukau Institute of Technology Award for Manaakitanga: Leo Mwape (Manawatu/Whanganui)
- Tohu Auahatanga – the Speech NZ Award for Delivery: Esther Sovincet (Auckland)
- Tohu Manukura i te Reo - the Māori Language Commission Award for Te Reo Māori: Jacqueline Te Kani-Nankivell (Gisborne)

The judges for the National Final were Deputy Commissioner Wallace Haumaha of NZ Police; Mrs Huti Watson, representing the NZ Bahá'í Community; and Saunoamaali'i Karanina Sumeo, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner who substituted for the Race Relations Commissioner who was unable to attend.

After the six national finalists gave their speeches, the Honourable Priyanca Radhakrishnan, Minister for Ethnic Communities, Diversity and Inclusion congratulated them and reflected on some of the key messages conveyed in their speeches.

Around 150 people were present for the national final. Other people who attended included: Judge Frances Eivers (Children's Commissioner), Fiona Cassidy (Executive Director, Office of the Children's Commissioner), Hon Jenny Salesa (Labour MP for Panmure-Ōtāhuhu), Dr Betty Ofe-Grant (Vice President, National Council of Women), Anmar Taufeek (National Council of Women), Karun Shenoy (Chair, English Language Partners), Lesley Hosking (CE, Teaching Council), Melissa Lee (National MP, spokesperson for ethnic communities), Golriz Ghahraman (Green MP, spokesperson for human rights and ethnic communities).

Preparations are now well advanced for the 2024 Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui which will be on the theme Te Taura Tangata - The Rope of Unity. As always, students will be asked to consider a Bahá'í quote and a Māori whakatauki while preparing their speeches.

Regional heats will be held between 21 and 28 March in fourteen regions around New Zealand, and the national semi-finals, National Final, and National Hui will be on 4 and 5 May at Ngā Kete Wānanga Marae, Manukau Institute of Technology, Otara.

We are extremely fortunate that the New Zealand Police remain the principal sponsors of the Speech Awards, with other very welcome sponsorship coming from the Hedi Moani Charitable Trust, the Human Rights Commission, MIT, the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (Māori Language Commission) and Speech NZ. We are also supported by the NZ Federation of Multicultural Councils, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Studio Marque and the Astor Foundation. Funding was also provided by Foundation North, The Tindall Foundation, NZ National Commission for UNESCO and the Ethnic Communities Development Fund.

The Office is delighted that for the past few years the Speech Awards and Hui have been self-supporting and have not had to draw on the National Fund, due to compelling funding applications that have been written by Tamsin James and Sandra Paymani.

## National Hui

The topic of the 2023 Race Unity Speech Awards (RUSA) was Awhiwhia te rito – Nurture the young. The 2023 hui again incorporated the national semi-finals of the Speech Awards which were run before lunch, with the speakers advancing to the National Final being announced after the lunch break. From approximately 2pm – 6.30pm workshops and shared reflections took place. This was followed by dinner and Mana Mokopuna provided some musical entertainment during this time. It was decided that this year we would not extend hui discussions or workshops into the evening as this typically has poor attendance and we are aware that the students entering the finals on Sunday would benefit from an early night. Saturday saw over 120 individuals from diverse backgrounds come together. Once again we had exceptional participation from adults, not just youth.

The Hui content was developed by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (now known as Mana Mokopuna) and they took the lead in the facilitation as well. A relatively small number attended the afternoon hui component of the day, approximately 12 rangatahi plus facilitators, the adult group was approximately 30 including 2-3 facilitators.

Some reflections of the afternoon sessions of the hui include:

- Our Bahá'í youth facilitators became participants, rather than helping Mana Mokopuna with the facilitation. This was disappointing as their skills were not fully utilised.
- The content was stretched unnecessarily over the two sessions, additional content could have been included to make the sessions more robust.
- Participation was quite low, many rangatahi left after the announcement of the finalists.
- These are all areas we will work on improving for 2024.

## Regional Hui

2023 saw three regional hui take place, in Hamilton, Rotorua and Taranaki, engaging almost 100 participants in total.

During national hui, rangatahi were given an 'Expression of interest' form to complete if they were interested in hosting a hui in their region. Upon contact being made over the following weeks, rangatahi were given options of what their regional hui might look like e.g. fully hosted and facilitated by themselves, co-hosted and facilitated with someone from the RUSA team or alumni.

The Hamilton regional hui was co-hosted and facilitated by the regional champion Maja Hassell and the RUSA team, this was held at St Paul's Collegiate with approximately 40 students. Maja chose the content to be identical to the national hui, students were split into three smaller groups for discussions on solutions towards racism. The students suggested that these sessions would be beneficial to be held during one of their Hauora classes. The RUSA team followed this idea up with the appropriate teacher however the timing didn't work out being it was late in the year and their curriculum was already pre-planned and aligned to their upcoming exams.

The Rotorua regional hui was solely organised by their regional champion Gargi Vaidya. The RUSA team provided some examples of previous hui, Gargi chose the one she preferred and facilitated it with exceptional ease. This hui was held at the Rotorua Arts Centre and attended by almost 50 people, adults, and rangatahi from various schools. The president of the Rotorua Multicultural Council, Margriet Theron also attended. The RUSA team provided the kai, cost of the venue, and any moral support required (which was minimal).

The Taranaki regional hui was held in Stratford at the Diocesan School for Girls. This was organised by regional coordinators Ainslie Duncan and Mervyn Chivers. The 21 girls who attended represented 5 schools, Sacred Heart Girls' College (New Plymouth), New Plymouth Girls' High School, Diocesan School for Girls, Te Paepae O Aotea, and Ōpunake High School. They were accompanied by two teachers and a principal. Also attending was a representative from the Ministry of Ethnic Communities. A representative from New Plymouth District Council and an Interim Operations Co-Lead from WITT attended for the afternoon session. Most of the day was spent in small groups of about six students who worked together sharing their ideas and working towards creating a shared goal they could then take into the wider community.

## Post awards events

There were other opportunities for rangatahi to participate in discourse on race relations. On the 17th of July the National Champion, Esther Sovincet, captivated her audience of 40 RTLBs (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) with her exceptional speech at a teacher-only day for the Tuawhito o Akarana RTLB Cluster in Auckland. Subsequently, on the 22nd of July semi-finalist, Lena Ormsby, presented her stirring speech in front of no less than 250 delegates at a Māori Tamil Hui organised by the Aotearoa NZ Federation of Tamil Sangams in Auckland. Additionally, on the 1st of September, Hamilton's Regional Champion presented

her thought-provoking speech at the launch of Welcoming Week in the presence of Mayor Paula Southgate, various city council officials, plus a captive audience of at least 120 people. The momentum continued to build on the 21st of September where selected rangatahi, Esther Sovincet, Taila Luani, reduced some of their audience to tears with their speeches at a Ministry of Education Diversity Symposium to another group of 15 secondary school teachers.

## 20th anniversary of the Race Unity Speech Awards

This event was first planned to take place in 2020 but was postponed by Covid. It was re-scheduled and postponed twice more (September 2021 and March 2022) but it finally took place on 4 April 2023 and was renamed the 21st anniversary. The celebration was held in the Banquet Hall of Parliament, hosted by two Crown Ministers: Hon. Stuart Nash (Minister of Police) and Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan (Minister for Diversity, Inclusion and Ethnic Communities). The Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly offered a few remarks on behalf of the Bahá'í community.

The event was attended by the Commissioner for Police, Andrew Coster; Deputy Commissioner Wallace Haumaha (who has been the Chief Judge of the Speech Awards for many years); and Race Relations Commissioner, Meng Foon. Over 250 people gathered for the celebration, with diplomatic representatives from France, Hungary, Argentine, Greece, Netherlands, China, Philippines, USA, Greece, Tuvalu, Saudi Arabia, India, Canada, and Samoa.

A panel discussion was facilitated by Minister Radhakrishnan, who asked pre-prepared questions of the three panellists (all Speech Awards alumni). A publication marking the 21st anniversary was launched at the event. It includes interviews with and articles about our first 21 National Champions, along with feature articles about other Speech Awards alumni who have gone on to do valuable work in the wider community; some history of the Speech Awards; and articles that show the development and growth of this Kaupapa. An anniversary cake was then ceremoniously cut.

Just before the closing of the programme Deputy Commissioner Wallace Haumaha was presented with a gift from the New Zealand Bahá'í Community. This is in recognition of the support he has given to the Speech Awards over many years, and the fact that he is retiring from Police in January of next year. It was a beautifully carved hoe, crafted by Kaiako Whakairo Raj Irving.

With generous sponsorship from NZ Police and the NZ National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation the Office was able to run the anniversary celebration at no cost to the National Fund.

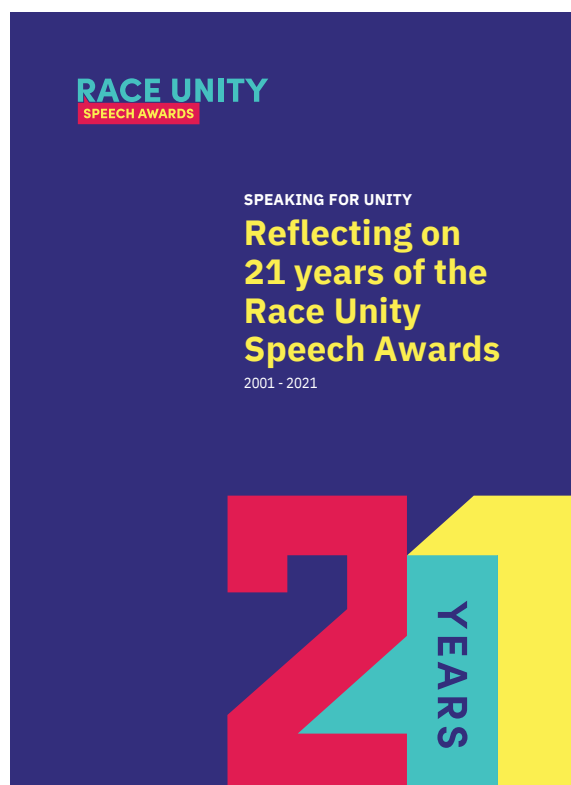
## The Race Unity team

Sandra Paymani stepped up to take on the role of Programme Manager for her first year and did an excellent job, coordinating all of the many moving parts and people who contribute to this nationwide initiative. On the communications and media front she was assisted by a part-time contractor, Mabel Muller.

Bev Watson, who established the Awards in 2001, continues to make a huge contribution to the successful running of the Speech Awards, being the key liaison between speakers, parents, teachers and schools as well as contributing in many other areas.

Now in its twenty-fourth year, the Race Unity Speech Awards show no sign of coming to the end of their life. Indeed, this initiative continues to expand and to attract more supporters as time goes by. Some strong and enduring relationships have also been forged with teachers, students and some parents. The feedback received each year continues to show a high level of support and respect for the Awards and its accompanying Hui.

Much credit for this must go to the regional coordinators whose dedication and hard work are critical, with the support of their Local Spiritual Assemblies. But of course, the Awards would not exist without the thoughtful, passionate students who are willing to share their views about how to promote racial harmony in Aotearoa/New Zealand.



The front cover of a publication marking the 21st anniversary of the Race Unity Speech Awards which was launched at the event.



# Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity

## Te Huihuinga Akoranga mo ngā take Houkura o te Ao

**A space in which young adults can come together, study materials, reflect, and consult on the conceptual framework that informs the way they think about important aspects of their own lives and the life of society.**

In order to learn about raising the capacity of young adults to participate in the prevalent discourses of society, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP), in collaboration with the institutions of the Faith, offers a series of seminars to Bahá'í tertiary students. The seminars aim to help these students raise their capacity to contribute to the betterment of society by providing a space for them to come together annually, over the course of four years, to study a set of materials that helps them build an evolving conceptual framework which, informed by the teachings of the Faith and the accumulated knowledge of humanity in different fields, can guide their thought and action during their formative years as university students. In its 30 December 2021 letter to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice describes the seminars as a “notable example of one form of education through which young believers are becoming better acquainted with a Bahá'í perspective on issues relevant to the progress of humanity.” These seminars come in two offerings: an undergraduate programme for university students, and a graduate programme for young adults who have already completed an undergraduate degree. Both of these programmes were offered to the Aotearoa Bahá'í community this year and were both well-attended and highly-spirited.

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### Undergraduate Seminar - Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland

The undergraduate seminar – which ran from 3 to 13 February 2024 – was held at the newly refurbished Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í. The physical and spiritual characteristics of the property lent themselves to the generation of an uplifting, joyful and cooperative environment for all those in attendance. With the assistance of a resilient and enthusiastic core group of facilitators, all four years of the programme were offered to a group of 32 young adults from across the country. The unparalleled spirit at this year's seminar strengthened the participants' endeavours both inside and outside the classroom and facilitated the creation of strong bonds of true friendship. A highlight of the seminar was a memorable field trip to the Fred Hollows Foundation. The following reflections from the participants give some insight into their experience of the seminar and its impact on their lives:

*“My thinking has changed dramatically over the past four years of ISGP. I think what has truly influenced my thinking is my conceptual framework interlinking the complementary bodies of science and religion. This understanding has shifted the way I approach all areas of my life, in my interactions with my studies, my ability to facilitate discussions and in general the ways I approach participating in discourse.”*

*“[ISGP] fills my heart with the desire to serve at a higher capacity.”*

*“ISGP will confirm and answer the questions you have in relation to our true purpose as Bahá'ís and how it is possible to achieve coherence in this life.”*

In the leadup to the 2024 undergraduate seminar, the coordinating team strengthened its ties with collaborators across the country by meeting periodically to study relevant guidance, identify potential participants in different localities, and discuss the challenges these youth face in committing to and attending the seminars. During a ‘conversation campaign’ held in the month of November, these collaborators, along with various institution members and participants from the previous year's seminars, gave attention to speaking with youth and their families about the seminars and helping them overcome obstacles in order to participate. To be more effective, such a conversation campaign can be moved to earlier in the year. Local Spiritual Assemblies have become more and more active in promoting the seminars to potential participants and extending assistance where needed, thereby supporting a number of youth to attend the seminars. A challenge encountered this year was the seminar dates, which regrettably overlapped by a few days with orientation weeks or tertiary courses that started earlier than the majority of other courses. The dates will be carefully reviewed for 2025.



Attendees of ISGP 2024 gather outside Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í

An area of learning for the ISGP team, which requires collaboration with the other institutions and agencies of the Faith, has been how to maintain the enthusiasm of participants kindled at the seminar throughout the year and assist them to connect what they learn at the seminar to their studies and service. There have been initial experiences that show great promise—such as a Local Assembly creating spaces for the ISGP participants in its jurisdiction to reflect and consult soon after the seminar, and seminar facilitators connecting with groups of participants from the same geographic area to study the higher courses of the institute on a weekly basis—but much remains to be learned in this area.



## Graduate Seminar - Yerrinbool, New South Wales

In addition to the undergraduate seminars, the ISGP graduate seminar was held from 27 December 2023 to 7 January 2024 at Yerrinbool, New South Wales. A group of five young professionals from Aotearoa attended this seminar. The graduate seminar assists individuals “to develop the capacity to examine and analyze society and the forces acting upon it, and to contribute to the evolution of thought and practice within their academic and professional fields.” The main theme of the seminar was ‘Achieving Coherence’ and participants were encouraged to think deeply about their fields of work and study and how they may take steps to participate in discourses relevant to the progress of their fields. This was the second year that a group of friends from Aotearoa has made arrangements to attend the graduate seminar together, and highlights the important role of mutual support and encouragement in efforts made to advance the discourses of society.

Image to the left:  
Attendees of ISGP 2024 during their ‘field trip’ to the Fred Hollows Foundation headquarters.



Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity students gather outside Te Whare Akoranga Bahá’í, 3-13 February 2024



### New Zealand Bahá'í Bookshop

The Bahá'í Bookshop received over 2,000 orders through its online shop during the year, compared with 647 in 179 B.E. There are over 600 titles listed (up from 560 in 179 B.E.)

### Institute books sold

The following quantities of books sold are in addition to the many study circles that operated online using these materials in digital form.

The Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) in consultation with the Regional Institute Boards is planning to provide the Institute material books in better quality in the coming year.

Main Sequence Titles	No. sold - 180 B.E.	No. sold - 179 B.E.
Ruhi Book 1	211	364
Ruhi Book 2	162	205
Ruhi Book 3 - Grade 1	51	196
Ruhi Book 3 - Grade 2	20	30
Ruhi Book 3 - Grade 3	31	23
Ruhi Book 3 - Grade 4	20	18
Ruhi Book 4	74	61
Ruhi Book 5	83	145
Ruhi Book 6	85	15
Ruhi Book 7	12	37
Ruhi Book 8 Unit 1	10	38
Ruhi Book 8 Unit 2	8	21
Ruhi Book 8 Unit 3	17	30
Ruhi Book 9 Unit 1	15	37
Ruhi Book 9 Unit 2	17	10
Ruhi Book 9 Unit 3	6	16
Ruhi Book 10 Unit 1	34	84
Ruhi Book 10 Unit 2	35	91
Ruhi Book 10 Unit 3	19	20
Ruhi Book 11 Unit 1	366	164
Ruhi Book 11 Unit 2	353	123
Ruhi Book 11 Unit 3	306	Not Published
Ruhi Book 12 Unit 1	62	60
Ruhi Book 12 Unit 2	138	Not Published
Ruhi Book 13 Unit 1	26	21
Ruhi Book 13 Unit 2	23	23
Ruhi Book 14 Unit 1	36	65

Junior Youth titles	No. sold - 180 B.E.	No. sold - 179 B.E.
Breezes of Confirmation	149	113
Drawing on the Power of the Word	40	50
Glimmerings of Hope	98	66
Habits of an Orderly Mind	200	141
Learning about Excellence	62	39
Observation and Insight	150	22
On Health and Well-Being	385	321
Power of the Holy Spirit	36	24
Rays of Light	35	Not Published
Spirit of Faith	85	37
The Human Temple	36	35
Thinking about Numbers	38	23
Walking the Straight Path	145	117
Wellspring of Joy	175	134

#### The following titles were acquired by the BDS in 180 B.E.

- A Day for Very Great Things - The Lives of Howard Colby Ives and Mabel Rice-Wray Ives
- A Unifying Vision in Action
- For the Betterment of the World
- My Home
- Point of Adoration: The Story of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh
- Radiant Hearts Bahá'í Prayers and Passages for Children
- Rays of Light
- Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age
- Ruhi Book 11, Unit 3
- Ruhi Book 12, Unit 2
- Ruhi Book 14, Unit 2
- Ruhi Book 6 (New edition)
- Ruhi Book 7 (New edition)
- Safeguarding the Interests of Young People - Branch course, Unit 1: Reflecting on our endeavours
- The Dispensation of the Báb
- The National Spiritual Assembly : A compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice



# National Property Committee

## Ngā rawa

### The National Property Committee oversees the maintenance and development of Bahá'í properties

The National Bahá'í Property Committee has pursued its objectives throughout the past year, focusing on various aspects of property management and development within the community. This report outlines the key initiatives, achievements, challenges, and notable developments undertaken by the committee during this period.

## National Learning Centre

Concerning the development of the Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í management framework document, significant outcomes have been achieved. These include the establishment of a Centre Manager on-site and commencement of the Management Document and some initial socialisation with national and Auckland Cluster institutions. The appointment of a Catering Team, Maintenance Team, and Usage Team are also notable here. Additionally, the committee has made progress in drafting a Bookings Framework and a Health & Safety document. Challenges, particularly in addressing catering costs and the time-intensive efforts required for team development and documentation have been noted.

## Current locally owned Bahá'í Centres

Efforts have been directed towards studying strategic documents with property-owning communities to better explore the utilisation of properties. Milestones include conducting studies with the Thames-Coromandel Spiritual Assembly leading to property purchase decisions and similar study engagements with the Auckland Spiritual Assembly. Challenges arise in scheduling study sessions with multiple Local Spiritual Assemblies.

## Maintenance and protection of properties

The Property Committee has been accompanying the National Property Care and Maintenance Coordinator, and this has facilitated property upkeep and safety considerations. The appointment and orientation of the Coordinator mark significant progress in this area, yet challenges persist in establishing ongoing support systems and addressing health & safety concerns nationwide.

## Regional Councils

Biannual meetings have provided a platform to discuss property needs comprehensively. Notable achievements include a combined meeting with representatives from North and South Island Regional Bahá'í Councils, facilitating clarity on property requirements nationwide. However, challenges such as limited council representation and meeting frequency remain areas for improvement.

## Other significant developments

The property transactions in Thames-Coromandel highlighted the importance of unity and dynamic decision-making in such endeavours. Additionally, the appointment of a National Property Health and Safety Coordinator signals a proactive approach to address safety concerns. Resource constraints and shifting priorities have resulted in several pending items.



Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í, Henderson Valley

## Brief overview

The first 12 months of operation at our new facility ran relatively smoothly overall, despite a delayed start due to compliance holdups, which led to the full Code of Compliance being issued later than anticipated. It took several months before we could approve full booking requests, including those from the wider community, to enable the facility to be utilised as intended.

## Facility operations

From the receipt of booking requests to the completion of events, operations proceeded relatively smoothly. However, timely confirmation of bookings requires refinement, as it got off to a slow start due to uncertainties regarding venue availability. Close communication with event coordinators throughout events occurred naturally. The coordination between the facility manager and catering team was crucial for the smooth running of meal services, which, overall, was successful. We particularly enjoyed working with Freddy and the Eight Roses team, with continuous communication being of utmost importance both leading up to and during events. Reporting event information, including costs to the National Treasury, took some time to streamline due to the complexity of booking variables. The current booking spreadsheet, although comprehensive, does not fully accommodate certain variations of information, necessitating manual calculation at this early stage. Clean-up of the venue after events by groups gradually improved throughout the year, although time constraints occasionally hampered our best intentions.

## Venue events

A wide range of events were held by various institutions such as the National Spiritual Assembly, Regional Bahá'í Council (North Island), Regional Institute Board (North Island), and Auxiliary Board members, and included regional coordination seminars, junior youth camps, family camps, and spiritual health retreats. It is worth noting that some coordinators of the junior youth camps expressed on more than one occasion that they felt Te Whare Akoranga might not be an ideal venue for these events, citing the high standard of the facility not being conducive to this exuberant age group.

## Health and safety

Ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations is a full-time role in itself, involving the communication and adherence to vast health and safety compliance information from the start to the completion of events. This also extends to all contractors entering the site to carry out maintenance work. A recent health emergency during the regional coordination and Area Teaching Committee seminar was the first major incident from which much was learned.

## Usage and maintenance teams

The Facility Usage Team functions by periodically reviewing the facility's usage to ensure it meets the current needs of the Faith. This team consults to address less clear-cut matters related to bookings, usage, and minor facility developments on a case-by-case basis. Their assistance to the manager in prioritising bookings and events in the Auckland Cluster was invaluable. The team comprised an Auxiliary Board member for Protection, the Auckland junior youth Coordinator, Regional Bahá'í Council member, a representative from the National Property Committee, and the manager.

The Maintenance Team is focused on the upkeep and maintenance of the facility. It consists of two Bahá'ís from Core City Group who were part of the project management team for the rebuild of the facility, a National Property Committee member, and the facility manager. Close communication was maintained on all maintenance work carried out, with a significant portion of this year's work involving warranty-related tasks.

## Maintenance and grounds

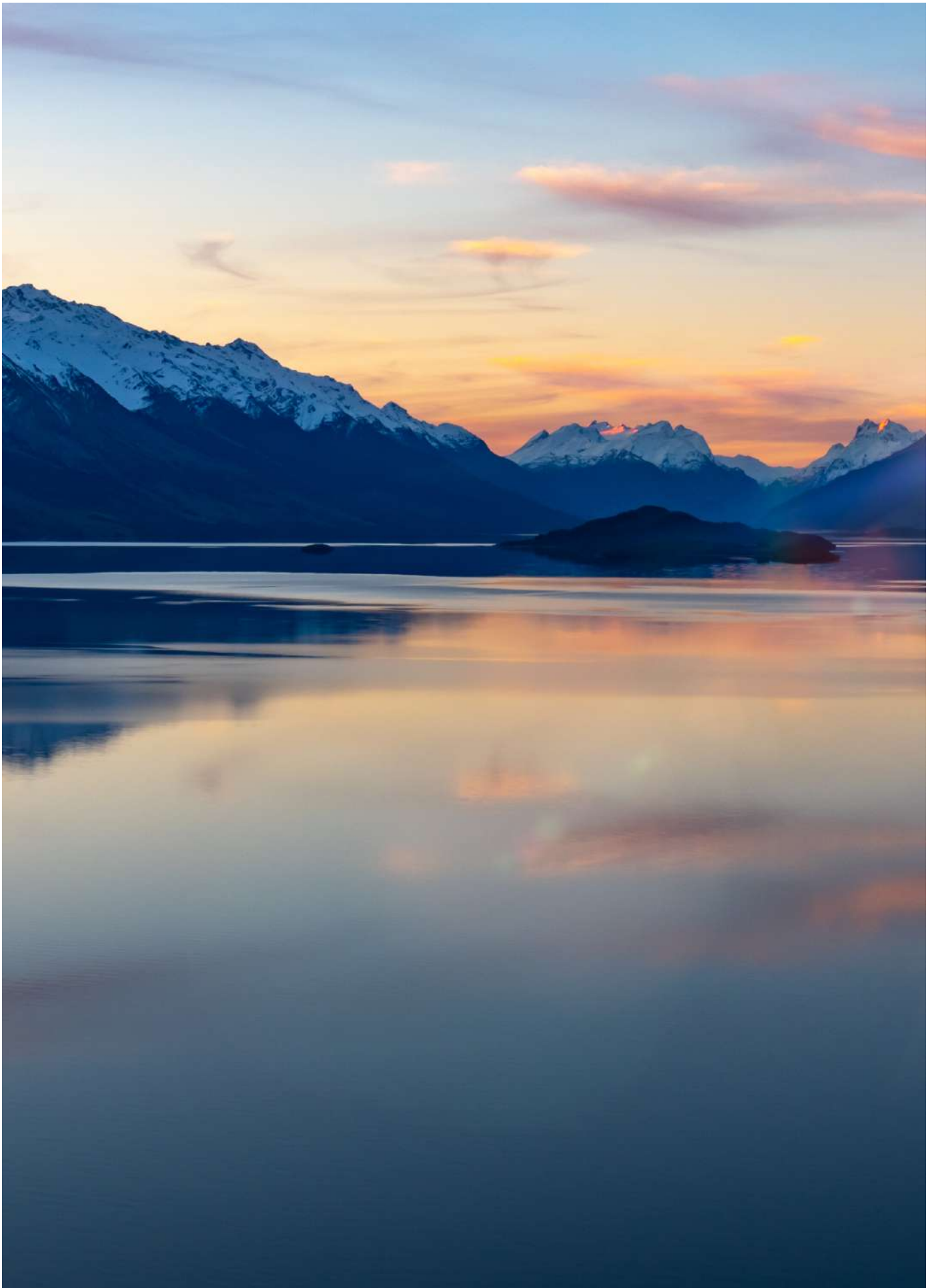
Maintaining building interior cleanliness and grounds maintenance certainly kept us continuously busy. Additionally, the amount of warranty work required on the building interior had Alaska contractors continuously returning to either fix issues or complete the 12-month warranty remedial work, of which there was a considerable amount.

## Improvements to the facility

Enhancing the functionality of the facility would greatly benefit from the addition of a dedicated meeting/conference room separate from the current dining area. This room should accommodate up to 100 participants or more. Currently, when there are 40 or more individuals gathered, the dining room's dual function as a meeting space becomes challenging.

## Ways to support the Manager

Having an enthusiastic, dedicated core group of friends willing to assist with general service and interior cleaning on a regular basis throughout the year would greatly aid the manager. Additionally, having a relief person or couple available to mind the property and provide the manager with occasional breaks would be beneficial.







**National Administration**  
Te Ohu Whakahaere a-motu

Projects and processes under the direct supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly

**Community Statistics**  
Nga Tatauranga Hapori

Bahá'í population and locality information

**In Memoriam**

He whakamaharatanga ki te hunga kua wheturangitia atu

A record of community members who have passed to the next world

**Words from the Supreme Body on the spiritual  
enterprise at this time**

Ngā kupu mai i te Tinana Matua i runga i te  
hinonga wairua i tēnei wā

# National Administration

## Te Ohu Whakahaere a-motu

Projects and processes under the direct supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly.

*The National Assembly notes that this is a strategically important time, because Ridván 181 is the midpoint of the first phase of the Nine Year Plan, and is an appropriate time for all of the institutions and agencies of the Faith to reflect with clarity as we read the reality of where we are currently at and how we are contributing to the development of the Faith. The messages of the House of Justice describe what it means for this Faith to be a learning community and how since its inception the Faith has progressed through learning. How do we then bring in greater measure to all our endeavours, as institutions, individuals and communities, this capacity to learn? The National Assembly is itself on a journey to having a stronger process of learning in its own areas of endeavour. For example, the Assembly has continued to advance its learning about the development of a more inclusive Bahá'í community, about the settings in which everyone, particularly Māori friends, can feel that they are part of a community that truly embodies unity in diversity, about how to increase awareness about the attitudes and behaviours of the individual, institutions and communities that contribute to this, and how the processes of civilisation building, driven by the engine of growth - the Institute process - are applied in diverse cultural settings. The National Assembly has developed a working document that acts as a tool to assist in generating and advancing its learning in this area.*

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## Relationship with the Institution of the Counsellors

The National Spiritual Assembly continues to have a close collaborative relationship with the Institution of the Counsellors and is deeply thankful for the wise counsel and advice that it receives through this precious relationship.

During 180 B.E., 10 of the National Assembly's 22 meetings involved joint meetings with one or more Counsellors, for part if not the whole meeting. The Counsellor designated by the Continental Board of Counsellors to liaise closely with our country, Ms Tessa Scrine, met formally with the National Spiritual Assembly nine times during the year, with the Nine Year Plan framing all such joint consultations. She was also in frequent informal consultations on a wide range of topics with the National Secretary.

There were three occasions where Ms Scrine and the National Assembly held joint consultations for three days. On two of these occasions, she was joined by her fellow Counsellor Dr Vahid Saberi: the first took place in September 2023, where a joint retreat considered deeply the matter of human resource development undertaken by the training institute. This arose as an outcome of the Universal House of Justice's guidance to Counsellors on 30 December 2021: *"The knowledge that has now accumulated about factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the institute process is extensive, and we look to the International Teaching Centre to organise what has been learned and make it available to you."* The National Assembly was deeply grateful to our two much loved and admired Counsellors for the wealth of knowledge, insights and experience they shared with the National Assembly over the course of three very potent days of learning.

The second occasion when Dr Saberi joined Ms Scrine for three days with the National Spiritual Assembly, was when our two institutions were also joined by the two regional institutions – the Regional Bahá'í Councils - in November, for a gathering of sharing, exploration of guidance and experience, and learning. This was held over the last weekend of November, during which the newly appointed Councils commenced the first day of their term of service on the Day of the Covenant. Going forward, it was decided that future Regional Council gatherings organised jointly by the Counsellors and National Assembly will take place for three days over the first weekend of each December.

Mrs. Latai 'Atoa, a Counsellor residing in Tonga, represented the Continental Board of Counsellors at the National Convention for 180 B.E. (see National Convention section) and met with the newly elected National Spiritual Assembly for a short meeting during that period. It was a delight for the members of the institutions and delegates from around the country to meet Mrs 'Atoa for the first time, and following the Convention she wrote: *"I have enjoyed every minute of the three days of rich consultation with all the wonderful accompaniment of the dear Auxiliary Board members."*



National Assembly and Counsellor retreat 22-24 September 2023

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## Relationship with the agencies and institutions

The National Spiritual Assembly is immensely grateful to the Regional Bahá'í Councils and to the Regional Institute Boards for the extensive service they provide to the Faith in Aotearoa. Meetings with the Councils during the year, and more briefly with representatives of the Institute Boards, are always important touchpoints for the National Assembly to be able to offer its profound and loving appreciation for the service given by the dedicated souls who serve so tirelessly in these capacities, including the regional and cluster coordinators and Area Teaching Committee members who work under them. It is extremely difficult to imagine how the extensive activities, growth and progress of the Cause could occur without the sacrificial and consecrated endeavours of these servants of the Blessed Beauty and their many collaborators.

We are also immensely grateful to so many other agencies of the National Assembly who give of their time and energy unstintingly, such as the coordinators of the Office of Public Affairs, the members of the National Property Committee, Te Whare Akoranga Management and Maintenance Team, Reference Library Custodian, to name but a few. Additionally, a number of individuals have assisted in various capacities, ranging from helping with stocktaking, supplying business cards to the Office of Public Affairs and others who offered their knowledge and expertise in areas such as insurance inquiries, legal matters and help with proofreading and translations. Please review the chart showing the network of institutions and agencies to gain a full picture of the components of the national administration, and bear in mind each of those components comprises friends who serve diligently in many capacities to ensure that the work of the Faith is always progressing.

The National Spiritual Assembly continues to extend its capacities through the creation of new roles and the appointment of capable individuals with the necessary skills and expertise. These include a National Health and Safety Coordinator who will ensure robust processes are in place for health and safety protocols across all properties owned by the National Assembly, with a particular focus on Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í and the Henderson Valley property on which this facility is situated. Also, a National Property Care and Maintenance Coordinator, whose role will primarily be to coordinate and build capacity alongside property-owning communities for the protection and maintenance of their properties.

The National Spiritual Assembly met on 10 September with the Project Managers of the development of

Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í, and key members of the project management team – to debrief and to formally thank them for their sacrificial service.

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## The flow of information and guidance

The National Assembly disseminates information and guidance through various channels including letters and emails sent to Local Spiritual Assemblies, Bahá'í Groups, and directly to all believers via the Mailchimp platform. Guidance, news, stories, notices etc. are also shared through the online national newsletter Bahá'í Aotearoa. Other websites operate for specific purposes (such as the National Convention) and as the public face of the Bahá'í Faith in New Zealand ([bahai.org.nz](http://bahai.org.nz)).

The National Assembly continues to explore how the flow of communication can become more systematic and how to convey key messaging more effectively, using a range of media and different tools in addition to letters. It identified opportunities where it could make key messaging central such as the Regional Council gathering, Summer School, Unit Convention, and National Convention.

A decision made early in the year was that the National Assembly would immediately come together to study any messages from the Universal House of Justice as soon as they are received, and so it was that on the day when the beautiful message from the House of Justice, written in response to the message from the National Convention was received, on 16 July 2023, the National Assembly studied and consulted on its contents. The commendation by the House of Justice of the progress of youth and groups of families taking charge of their own spiritual, social and material progress in Aotearoa undoubtedly brought much joy to those friends who are making these efforts, and is a strong signal that these are areas where more can be done by the generality of friends. The fortification of efforts that comes from embracing diversity is a valuable concept that has been offered by the House of Justice, and it is wonderful that the Supreme Body recognises that the community of the Greatest Name in Aotearoa has realised that *“strength and beauty [is] to be found in embracing diversity”*.

The National Assembly identified that in its own flow of messaging to the friends, the purpose is to assist the friends to arise with *“unrestrained fervour, to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures”*. It is now, in this stage of the Faith's development, that social and material progress is mentioned alongside spiritual progress.



Released on the anniversary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2023, the Universal House of Justice sent a letter of historic dimensions to the Bahá’í world. The National Spiritual Assembly sent this missive to the Bahá’í community the following day. As per the wish of the House of Justice, the message was formatted into a small booklet and made available for purchase as a publication through the Bahá’í Distribution Service. Titled ‘Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age’, this A5 sized, 53-page booklet was designed for convenient study, featuring 89 sequentially numbered paragraphs for ease of reference. The message was also translated into a number of Pasifika languages, and booklets in Chinese and Tuvaluan are also being printed and distributed.

A new compilation on the National Spiritual Assembly was announced in a letter dated 31 October 2023 from the Department of the Secretariat. *“In light of the significant advances in recent years in the maturation and development of National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice asked the Research Department to prepare a compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í writings as well as from letters written on its behalf to assist the friends in acquiring a deeper understanding of the central role the National Spiritual Assembly plays in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh and a greater appreciation of its significance.”*

On 31 May 2023, the National Assembly shared with the Bahá’í community an informative video about the centre for learning on the Faith’s Hyde Dunn property in Henderson, Auckland. The video was suitable for showing at Feast and provided a clear account of the benefits provided by Te Whare Akoranga and the high-quality environment it offers for holding various kinds of events. The video was also shown during the National Convention.

On 30 December 2023, the National Assembly shared the inspiring short video from the Bahá’í World News Service 2023: *Year in Review* (that looked back at glimpses from efforts around the global Bahá’í community to contribute to social progress) and encouraged the friends to view it at the Feast of Sharaf or the Feast on 19 January.

The National Assembly prepared and shared a special video message for the Feast of ‘Alá’ (Loftiness) on February 29/March 1 2024, encouraging believers to use the Fast to give focused attention to the significant letter of the Universal House of Justice sent on 28 November 2023.

**Listed hereafter are notable communications received from the World Centre during the year.**

- Naw-Rúz 180 Message to the followers of the Divine Beloved in the sacred land of Iran
- Riqdán Message 2023 to the Bahá’ís of the World from the Universal House of Justice

- For the Betterment of the World (2023 edition). This book was released to delegates as a gift during the Bahá’í International Convention. Prepared by the Bahá’í International Development Organization at the Bahá’í World Centre, it provides an illustration of how Bahá’í social and economic development is being carried out.
- 30 April 2023 Letter on behalf of the House of Justice regarding the public release online of the specially commissioned film *An Expansive Prospect*, produced for presentation at the Thirteenth International Bahá’í Convention.
- 9 May 2023 Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice advising about the website dedicated to the documentation of the persecution of Bahá’ís in Iran ‘Archives of Bahá’í Persecution in Iran’ ([iranbahaipersecution.bic.org](http://iranbahaipersecution.bic.org)).
- 28 June 2023 Letter on behalf of the House of Justice regarding a change in policy for pilgrimages in “light of the current security concerns in Israel”
- 15 August 2023 New compilation on marriage released: *To Set the World in Order: Building and Preserving Strong Marriages*, prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá’í World Centre. It seeks to provide Bahá’ís with a comprehensive resource that delves into the various facets of Bahá’í marriage, offering guidance, insights and reflections on the significance of this sacred institution.
- 11 October 2023 Message to all National Spiritual Assemblies from the Department of the Secretariat, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, conveying that, “while the conflict and uncertainty in the Holy Land are deeply concerning to the Bahá’ís of the world, they may be assured that measures are in place to provide for the safety and well-being of staff serving at the Bahá’í World Centre [and that] it is not possible to host pilgrims and visitors in the current circumstances.”
- 31 October 2023 Announcement of new compilation on the National Spiritual Assembly in a letter from the Department of the Secretariat.
- 28 November 2023 Letter to the Bahá’ís of the world, “Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age” (explained more fully in paragraphs above)
- 17 January 2024 Letter from the Department of the Secretariat, in which the Universal House of Justice conveyed that, despite the ongoing unsettled situation in the Holy Land, pilgrims will once again be welcomed to the Bahá’í World Centre from 12 February 2024
- **Other messages from the Universal House of Justice:** 15 May 2023 announcement of the appointment of the members of the International Teaching Centre for the five-year term beginning 23 May 2023; 15 November 2023 announcement of the appointment of the members of the Board of Directors for the Bahá’í International Development Organization for the five-year term

### Other important incoming communications

- 29 May 2023 letter from the New Zealand Catholic Bishop's Committee for Interfaith Relations conveying greetings for the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh Holy Day.
- 24 June 2023 communication from the Continental Board of Counsellors about changes to the membership and roles of the Auxiliary Board

### Outgoing communications from the National Spiritual Assembly

- 20 April 2023 appreciation letters to dignitaries attending Race Unity Speech Awards 21st Anniversary celebration
- 31 May 2023, the National Assembly shared a video about the Bahá'í Centre for Learning
- 18 July 2023 email letter to the friends in New Zealand highlighting some aspects in the House of Justice's message to New Zealand in response to the Convention message
- 19 July 2023 email letter to the Universal House of Justice expressing gratitude for beautiful message from the Supreme Institution, in response to message from National Convention
- 17 August 2023 Report to the Universal House of Justice on the unit conventions held in February 2023 in Auckland after it was divided into multiple units for the election of delegates. The National Spiritual Assembly also took the opportunity to mention the use of online voting systems within the broader context of participation in the electoral process.
- 4 September 2023 letter from National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies urging them "to "leave no stone unturned" in encouraging and supporting all students who are about to begin their tertiary studies to attend the seminars of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP), which were scheduled to be held 3-13 February 2024 in Auckland."
- 15 September 2023 to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Aotearoa regarding Summer School
- 13 October 2023 letters to the Universal House of Justice and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands confirming that financial assistance had been provided for the purchase of equipment and furniture for their National Office, as requested by the Universal House of Justice.
- 20 October 2023 letter to all Local Spiritual Assemblies asking them to take the necessary steps to create (or update) a robust emergency preparedness plan, considering the unique needs and circumstances of their communities, and enclosing an Emergency Preparedness Plan template.
- 20 October 2023 letter to Hon Nanaia Mahuta, retiring Minister for Foreign Affairs, expressing our deep appreciation for her exemplary service to New Zealand as the longest serving Māori woman Member of Parliament and the first woman Minister of Foreign Affairs; "We acknowledge the strength, courage and

knowledge you demonstrated in breaking new ground for wāhine Māori and women generally, and the strategic approach you took to critical issues. We are sincerely grateful for your willingness to speak up for oppressed peoples whose human rights are violated, including the Bahá'í religious minority in Iran."

- 30 December 2023 the National Assembly shared video from the Bahá'í World News Service 2023: *Year in Review*
- 5 February 2024 letter from the National Spiritual Assembly conveying important information about the requirements for travel to the Holy Land
- 5 February 2024 letter from the National Spiritual Assembly in which it advised the New Zealand Bahá'í community that Mr. Marc Rivers, who was currently serving as the National Treasurer would be leaving New Zealand at the end of March to take up a position as the Chief Financial Officer of the International Committee of the Red Cross, based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- 11 February 2023 letter to unit conventions taking place around Aotearoa
- 23 February 2024 the National Assembly shared a video message for the Feast of 'Alá'
- 11 March 2024 letter to all Bahá'í communities conveying initial information about Summer School
- **Other notable communications of the National Spiritual Assembly:** 28 March 2023 letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Democratic Republic of the Congo conveying heartfelt congratulations from the friends in Aotearoa to the friends in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the opening of the House of Worship in Kinshasa; 31 May 2023 letter to the friends in Guam extending its deepest sympathy to the entire Guam community for the losses experienced in the wake of Typhoon Mawar; 11 August 2023 letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Hawaiian Islands expressing love and unity from the friends in Aotearoa regarding the devastating wildfires in Maui; 15 August 2023 letter to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia in response to the announcement of the Dayspring of Light Project; 29 August 2023 letter to the Honourable Kausea Natano, Prime Minister of Tuvalu following up on an earlier invitation to join with National Spiritual Assembly and some members of the New Zealand Bahá'í community at a formal dinner when next visiting Auckland.
- Other communications to institutions, individuals, and communities about various topics including the Summer Schools; pioneers to the Cook Islands, Tahiti and the Czech Republic; Local Spiritual Assemblies and communities that are reaching the 50th anniversary of their establishment in 1974 – The Year of Grace.

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## Flow of statistics

The National Statistics Officer, in collaboration with Regional Statistics Officers, Area Teaching Committees and cluster coordinators, collects and maintains statistical data in SRP (Statistical Report Program).

A document has been developed in collaboration with the Regional Councils and Regional Institute Boards, that sets out a policy and procedures for access to the SRP program and ensuring confidentiality of the information it contains, for individuals serving at the regional and cluster levels.

### Policy

- All individuals serving at the regional and cluster levels requesting access to SRP must be approved by one of the following institutions: National Spiritual Assembly; Regional Bahá'í Council; Regional Institute Board.
- They must read and sign a Confidentiality Agreement and Memo.
- Access to SRP is given by the National Statistics Officer (NSO) and removed when individuals are no longer serving in that role.
- In general, information contained in an individual's SRP file can be shared with institutions and agencies, including with the National Spiritual Assembly of a country they are transferring to, with the following provision:  
*This document is strictly private, confidential and personal to its recipients and should not be copied, distributed or reproduced in whole or in part, nor passed to any third party. This information may be used only for the specified purpose and must be used in a sensitive manner which ensures the utmost privacy and confidentiality of the information.*

The National Statistics Officer provides the National Spiritual Assembly with the clusters' growth profiles and national analysis each cycle for its review assisting it to gain a clear picture of the clusters' strengths and to recognise trends in the patterns of growth.

The National Statistic Officer collaborates closely with the Regional Bahá'í Councils and the National Secretariat to collect and report information to the Bahá'í World Centre every six months about the number of individuals involved in community-building activities, movement of pioneers and social and economic development endeavours.

The National Secretariat in collaboration with Local Spiritual Assemblies maintains records of enrolments, reaffirmations, births and deaths through the national database (TuiCRM).

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## Bahá'í Aotearoa

*"It is clear from the writings of our beloved Guardian that the initiation, regular publication and distribution of a Bahá'í newsletter by each National Spiritual Assembly is one of its vital functions and a means of promoting understanding and unity among the friends, of stimulating their interest and deepening their knowledge of the teachings, and of co-ordinating the activities of the Faith."*

— *The Universal House of Justice, letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 24 August 1972*

The primary means of direct communication between the National Assembly and the believers in Aotearoa is through the national newsletter. In 2018, the newsletter transitioned from a printed format to an online platform - [bahaiaotearoa.bahá'í.org.nz](http://bahaiaotearoa.bahá'í.org.nz). The core purpose remains unchanged, which is to serve as a dependable disseminator of news, current events, and notable messages from the National Assembly, and the House of Justice.

Every effort is made to curate valuable news, aiming for weekly updates. Subscribers receive email notifications upon new content publication, and individuals can subscribe through the subscription form below each article or by contacting the National Office directly. Quarterly email digests featuring selected articles are distributed to all Aotearoa friends for whom the National Assembly possesses an email address.

During 180 B.E., the Bahá'í Aotearoa website received approximately 16,000 visits. The nine most-read articles during the year were:

- Summer school 2023 in pictures (January 2024)
- The start of a pioneering journey (October 2023)
- Decision to pioneer brings joyful surprises - Part 2 (August 2023)
- Decision to pioneer brings joyful surprises (March 2023)
- National Assembly's message to Unit Conventions (February 2024)
- Mr Stephen Hall to present at NZ Bahá'í Summer School (October 2023)
- Bahá'í Summer Schools announced (September 2023)
- National Convention meets in a spirit of joy (May 2023)
- House of Justice prays for peace (October 2023)



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## Summer School

On 13 July 2023, the National Assembly held an online gathering to discuss the future of summer schools and hear from representatives of the Regional Councils, Auxiliary Board members, and Institute Boards about this. It was a fruitful meeting and some pathways were identified for National Assembly consideration, which crystallized into the following considerations, among others:

Guiding concepts and approaches for the institution of Summer School:

1. Fostering the intellectual life of the community through education of the generality of the believers
2. Providing a satisfying environment to meet the needs of all ages
3. Ensuring that summer school empowers and inspires friends to further their service to the Cause in various ongoing ways
4. Ensuring coherence with teaching activities over the summer
5. Having a robust and ongoing system and processes to mobilise human resources for organising and preparing for summer schools each year
6. The size/groupings of summer schools can vary at any particular time or place, depending on needs/stages of development, but for the 2023 summer school there appeared to be consensus that groupings of 100-150 should be aimed for and that this can be done by groupings of clusters or sub-regional gatherings.

Using the model of how the House of Justice guided the world conferences could inform how the National Assembly guided the five sub-regional summer schools in the North Island and one regional summer school in the South Island, with the Regional Councils taking a leading role in identifying and sharing with host Local Assemblies the human resources needed for workshop facilitation, and to work with children and junior youth.

The Regional Councils were not only to provide the above, but also to prepare plenary sessions and related workshop materials for each of the four days, to follow on from each of the four plenary sessions organised by the National Assembly. In reflecting with the North Island Regional Council following the summer school, it became clear that this was a heavy load for the Council, and greater flexibility was subsequently offered to the Councils about their role in formulating next year's summer school programmes.

As in the past, it was expected that these gatherings are self-funding, with friends paying their own way, or being supported financially, if needed, as per processes already in place.

Objects for ongoing learning include:

- The institution of the summer school requires close and continual accompaniment by the National Assembly but this responsibility is gradually being devolved to institutions at regional and local levels.
- How can such spaces attract many souls - both Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith?
- How can participants imbibe a Bahá'í atmosphere and witness first-hand what Bahá'í community life can be?
- How can the medium of delivery foster active learning (rather than just participation by passive recipients) - e.g. through use of workshops, arts etc?
- How can summer school involve increasing participation by groups of families?
- How can summer school form an inseparable part of the teaching work and teaching campaigns?
- How can summer school stimulate in the participants a desire to continue deepening on the Word of God beyond the summer school spaces?

The National Assembly then held two online gatherings in August 2023 and invited the members of all Local Assemblies to attend one or the other, so that they could be brought into the picture and planning for what was envisaged for the upcoming summer schools. Members of the National Assembly and Regional Councils were present at both gatherings.

Local Assemblies of Auckland, Hamilton, Masterton and Whangarei each hosted vibrant Summer Schools across the North Island, often with the loving collaboration of sister Local Assemblies in their sub-region, and with the devoted service and support of many friends. An additional gathering initiated by a group of Māori friends offered the experience of a Kura Raumati on a marae in a completely Māori cultural manner in the lower North Island.

The five sub-regional gatherings, including two in Auckland, were held during late December 2023 and early January 2024. The Spiritual Assembly of Christchurch hosted a successful regional summer school for the South Island in early January 2024 and Māori friends there experienced a Kura Raumati parallel with the main summer school at the same venue. Other summer schools incorporated many elements of Māori culture and Tikanga (the Northland Summer School was held on a marae). The themes for the four days of the programme were aligned closely with those of the 2022 World Conferences, that is, aimed towards building capacities in the following ways:

- To better understand and be able to share with others Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity
- To raise up vibrant communities that are outward-facing and contribute to the spiritual and material progress of society
- To better understand the centrality of education and the training institute as the system to generate this progress
- and to learn how such progress leads to opportunities for all to contribute to social transformation.

Mr Stephen Hall who served as a member of the Universal House of Justice from 2010 until 2023 presented the keynote session on the topic of “Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity” on the first day of the summer schools.

The National Assembly is observing the learning arising from the initiatives of Māori friends to hold kura raumati (summer school) on marae, expressing tikanga fully in the implementation of their summer school and making this a welcoming space for any friends – Māori or non-Māori; and also from the greater integration of Māori cultural elements that have been woven into some of the (sub-)regional summer schools where these tikanga elements enhance the spirit of the gathering.

Each of these events was marked with a joyful community spirit, loving fellowship, uplifting experiences and much shared learning. The National Spiritual Assembly acknowledges the work done by the Regional Councils and host Assemblies, with the support of sister Assemblies and the many friends who gave time and energy to serve at the summer schools. These occasions gave effect to a range of beautiful and unique summer schools throughout Aotearoa in 180 B.E. These were empowering and uplifting spaces that expressed the diverse character of our community.

The vision of the National Assembly is that the summer schools will continue to evolve as a space for the friends to come together in a learning environment conducive to generating their wholehearted participation in the Plans and activities of the Cause.



Ice-breaker games during the South Island Regional Summer School, Christchurch - January 2024.



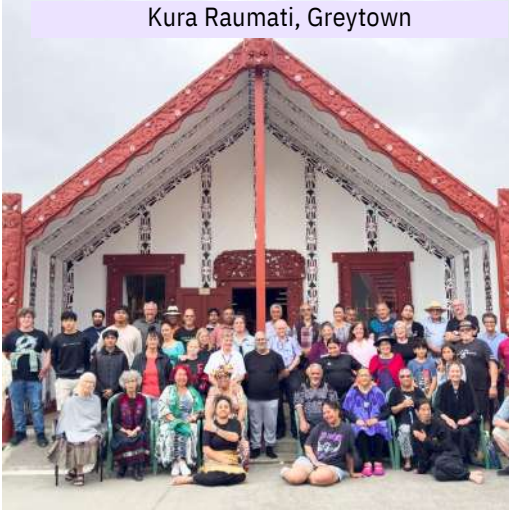
A cultural performance during the Auckland Summer School, Manurewa Bahá'í centre - December 2023





Additional glimpses from a few of the summer schools around the country

Kura Raumati, Greytown



Hamilton, Karapiro



Whangārei



South Island, Christchurch



Masterton



Auckland, Blockhouse Bay



Auckland, Manurewa



South Island, Christchurch



## Unit Conventions

Twenty-four unit conventions were held throughout Aotearoa on Sunday, 11 February 2023. From the elections associated with these conventions, 57 delegates have been elected to serve the institution of the National Convention. The National Spiritual Assembly's message to the unit conventions (provided below) asked believers to reflect on progress during the first two years of the Nine Year Plan and consider implications for future actions.

The recommendations and reflections received by the National Assembly provide it with valuable perspectives from the friends. The recommendations touched on many topics, some of which included building momentum around youth gatherings, the importance of pioneering, the expansion of ISGP to reach a wider group of young people, support for educational endeavours of the training institute in a Māori cultural setting, and summer schools contributing to the creation of a robust community life. Discussions also highlighted the importance of building capacities for engaging with local marae in mutually supportive ways and encouraging the learning and singing of prayers in te Reo Māori as a way of fostering cultural appreciation and spiritual unity.

An increased need for homefront pioneering was a recurring topic in some consultations. Small and more remote communities are also eager to engage with agencies of the Faith to gain a stronger appreciation of the learning and developments that are occurring based on the vision and framework of the Nine Year Plan.

### **National Assembly's message to unit conventions**

11 February 2023  
5 Mulk 180

*To unit conventions taking place around Aotearoa  
Beloved friends, Tēnā koutou katoa*

*Reports of the summer schools held recently around the country have thrilled the National Spiritual Assembly. They are beautiful examples of being conscious of having an outward orientation, creating a welcoming environment, and building elements of a robust community life regardless of the occasion or the space we are in. Our thanks go out to all who helped create such enriching spaces.*

*The National Assembly suggests the friends use the unit conventions as an opportunity to reflect on progress that has occurred over the initial two years of the Nine Year Plan, on what has been learned, on what the implications of this are for future actions, on what you see as aspects in community life that will help achieve the goals of the Plan, and on what obstacles may need to be overcome.*

*These unit conventions give an opportunity to reflect on what we have learned about connecting others to Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity, about building vibrant communities, engaging with educational endeavours, and striving to release the society-building power of the Faith in ever greater measures.*

*Central to all that we learn in these arenas is the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which articulates the vision, elaborates the concepts, delineates the major processes, and outlines the broad structures of the Plan. With this understanding, the National Assembly continues to commend Bahá'ís across Aotearoa to continue to study the recent guidance from the House of Justice, especially the letter dated November 28, 2023.*

*And for all of us who are distressed by the continued suffering in the world, the following passage from the Supreme Body elegantly captures our best response to the pain and suffering we behold:*

*“Let every one who is awake to the condition of the world, and to the persistent evils that warp the lives of its inhabitants, heed Bahá'u'lláh's call to selfless and steadfast service—heroism for the present age. What else will rescue the world but the efforts of countless souls who each make the welfare of humanity their principal, their dominating concern?”*

*The Universal House of Justice, October 2019*

*With loving Bahá'í greetings and aroha,*

*National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand*

### **Statistics**

As is shown in the table below, the participation by eligible voters in 2024 (38%) is the same as the percentage of participation in 2023 (38%). The percentage of participation in North Island in 2024 (37%) is slightly lower than 2023 (38%), however the percentage of participation in South Island in 2024 (43%) is higher compared to 2023 (40%).

### **COMPARISON OF PARTICIPATION**

	2024	2023
Percentage of participation	38%	38%
	2024	2023
Percentage of Present Ballots	21%	16%
Percentage of Postal Ballots	17%	22%
	2024	2023
North Island	37%	38%
South Island	43%	40%

NOTE: In 2023 the percentage of postal ballots (22%) were higher than the number in 2024 and the main reason was the flooding which happened in February 2023 and as a result some of the in-person conventions were cancelled and eligible voters sent their postal ballots to the head tellers.

## Table showing participation in voting for delegates to National Convention 181 B.E.

Unit	Localities	Participation
1	Far North (host)	43%
2	Whangarei (host), Kaipara	29%
3	Auckland (host) (Glenfield/Bays, Northcote and Rodney)	30%
4	Auckland (host) (Waitakere Central and Waitakere North)	31%
5	Auckland (host) (Waitakere East and Waitakere South)	33%
6	Auckland (host) (Auckland City, Orakei and Waiheke)	41%
7	Auckland (host) (Maungakiekie and Owairaka)	45%
8	Auckland (host) (Mangere North and Mangere South)	34%
9	Auckland (host) (Manurewa East, Manurewa West)	25%
10	Auckland (host) (Tamaki, Manukau & Otara & Papatoetoe East)	34%
11	Auckland (host) (Eastern Suburbs, Franklin and Papakura)	38%
12	Waipa (host) Hamilton, Matamata-Piako, Otorohanga, Waikato, Waitomo	34%
13	Western Bay of Plenty (host) Hauraki, Tauranga, Thames-Coromandel	43%
14	Rotorua (host) Kawerau, Opotiki, Whakatane	58%
15	Gisborne (host) Wairoa	46%
16	Napier (host) Central Hawke's Bay, Hastings	53%
17	Palmerston North (host) Horowhenua, Manawatu, New Plymouth, Rangitikei, South Taranaki, Stratford, Whanganui	38%
18	Taupo (host) Ruapehu, South Waikato	60%
19	Masterton (host) Carterton, South Wairarapa, Tararua	42%
20	Wellington (host) Hutt City, Kapiti Coast, Porirua, Upper Hutt	29%
21	Nelson (host) Marlborough, Tasman	42%
22	Christchurch (host) Buller, Chatham Islands, Grey, Hurunui, Kaikoura, Selwyn, Waimakariri, Westland	39%
23	Dunedin (host) Ashburton, Clutha, MacKenzie, Timaru, Waitaki, Waimate	46%
24	Invercargill (host) Central Otago, Gore, Queenstown-Lakes, Southland (including Stewart Island)	56%

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## National Convention

A joyful National Convention was held in the newly rebuilt centre for learning, Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í, on the Faith's historic Hyde Dunn property. Returning to the physical space of the building on the Bahá'í property in Henderson Valley after so many years was significant. The Guardian had given his blessing to the purchase of this property in 1948. A blessing of the building and pōwhiri prior to the opening of Convention was conducted by Māori believers.

Counsellor Latai 'Atoa, from Tonga, represented the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia at New Zealand's 67th annual National Bahá'í Convention.

*“Graced with the presence of Counsellor Latai 'Atoa, the consultations were characterised by a spirit of joy, enthusiasm and excitement at how far we have come as a national community and at the prospect that lies ahead.”* This is how the National Convention described its proceedings in its message to the Universal House of Justice. The complete message is shared later in this section.

All 57 delegates participated in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, of whom 54 were able to be present at the Convention. They were joined by five Auxiliary Board members and representatives of the Regional Bahá'í Councils of both Te Ika-a-Māui (3) and Te Waipounamu (4).

Consultation began with reflections on the Riqdán 2023 Message, and continued over the three days to explore how individuals and communities are working towards fulfilling Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a materially and spiritually prosperous world. Insights, learning and experiences were shared on a wide range of topics including how the friends are moving towards an emerging pattern of community life arising from long-term commitment, the training institute and its pivotal role in capacity building, the stirrings of social action in some settings, the strategy of working in groups of families, the community's growing commitment to Te Reo and Te Ao Māori, and the role of youth in advancing the Cause. The heartfelt love and concern for the progress of tangata whenua was wonderful to observe as the Guardian wished to see Māori serving at all levels in the Administrative Order.



Elected members of the National Spiritual Assembly for 180 B.E.

Insights were shared from the 13th International Convention by the National Spiritual Assembly. The Regional Council secretaries made presentations about their regions, offering wonderful insights for the delegates, and the Deputy Trustee of Huqúqu'lláh, Mrs Soheyla Bolouri (who was also a delegate) gave a beautiful presentation on behalf of the Regional Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh for Polynesia. There was a moving farewell given to long-standing, outgoing National Assembly member, Mr Sione Tu'tahi.

The National Spiritual Assembly expresses its enduring gratitude to the tellers, Convention task force and all the volunteers and caterers who assisted in creating such an uplifting occasion.

After the Convention, Counsellor Latai 'Atoa wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly to express her delight “to be in the midst of such a joyous Convention. The loving collaboration between the National Assembly and the delegates brings so much enlightenment to all. I have enjoyed every minute of the three days of rich consultation with all the wonderful accompaniment of the dear Auxiliary Board members.”

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## Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

Of the 57 elected delegates, all were able to cast their vote, and all ballots were valid, resulting in 513 valid votes.

Mrs Aumua replaced retiring member, Mr Sione Tu'tahi, to whom tribute was paid for some 15 years of devoted service on this institution. The National Assembly offers its loving appreciation to Sione and his family for their support over many years.

The National Assembly was also able to elect its officers, who remained the same as in the previous year.



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## Message from the Convention to the Universal House of Justice 180 B. E.

*Tēnei te karanga, tēnei te tangi  
Kia tūwhera ngā tatau ki te whaiao ki te ao mārama  
Tihei mauri ora!*

*This is the call, this is the cry  
To open the doorways to the spiritual world  
It is the breath of creation!*

*Dearly loved Universal House of Justice,*

*Mai i te kōpae ki te urupā, tātou ako tonu ai  
From the cradle to the grave we are forever learning!*

*Gathered under the shelter of Te Whare Akoranga Bahá'í[1] with hearts filled with gratitude, the delegates of the National Convention of Aotearoa New Zealand extend our sincerest love to our beloved Universal House of Justice in the Holy Land.*

*Te Whare Akoranga—our newly built centre for learning at the foot of the site of the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Henderson, Tāmaki Makaurau—stands not only as a symbol for the expansive vision ahead but also as a welcoming reminder of our spiritual forebears of the Faith in this nation. Entering its doors, this Convention also brought with it the remembrance of the life and strength of Lilian Ala'i, the last Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, the Pacific. The Concourse on High is no doubt with us, and their presence inspiring.*

*Opening with a heartfelt prayer for our dear sisters and brothers in Yemen, we were eager to start our consultations. Graced with the presence of Counsellor Latai 'Atoa, the consultations were characterised by a spirit of joy, enthusiasm and excitement at how far we have come as a national community and at the prospect that lies ahead. All 57 delegates participated in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly, of whom 54 were able to be present at the Convention. We were joined by five Auxiliary Board members and representatives of the Regional Bahá'í Councils of both Te Ika-a-Māui[2] and Te Waipounamu[3]. The delegates were delighted at the election of our National Spiritual Assembly, whose members represent the diversity of our nation.*

*The harmonious atmosphere was no doubt a reflection of the range of delegates representing our national community. Of particular note was the presence of a young Māori delegate, raised through the institute process and put forward to be the voice from her community. The strength and depth of insights from our Māori delegates have grounded the vision of our nation with added assurance of our determined commitment to learn, progress and draw on the transformative effect of the Word of God to heal and create the world anew.*

*Our deliberations began with reflections on the Ridván 2023 message, during which we observed how the 44 conferences held across Aotearoa mobilised groups of families and whole communities to create spaces in which Bahá'u'lláh's vision for a materially and spiritually prosperous world could be explored. We reflected on the shift in thinking that is becoming apparent across our community and heard examples of how the friends are moving away from seeing merely a set of activities, towards an emerging pattern of community life arising from long-term commitment and responsibility towards the development of a community. We heard about the modest steps taken by a Local Spiritual Assembly in a newly redrawn cluster to raise a conversation about race unity through its relationship with the local council, and a group of young professionals with children who took courageous steps to plan and carry out their first family camp. And, from our centres of intense activity, we heard about how the content of the training institute is increasingly inspiring the stirrings of social action in groups of families and through a strong and vibrant junior youth spiritual empowerment programme.*

*Insights were shared from the 13th International Convention by the National Spiritual Assembly, and we reflected on the natural coherence of our efforts and the variety of ways in which the training institute is at the heart of the capacity building that enables us to advance on all fronts.*

*Indeed, the need to strengthen the training institute featured regularly in our consultations. The delegates shared a deep concern for how communities and institutions can best create conditions that enable young people to progress on their path of service. Our society faces many challenges—especially those facing young people and families—but in these challenges we recognise opportunities, particularly when we approach them with an expansive view of the power and efficacy of the institute process.*

[1] The Bahá'í Centre for Learning

[2] North Island of New Zealand

[3] South Island of New Zealand

*Consultation reflected a steadily developing awareness of the rightful place of Māori in the vanguard of the Bahá'í community of Aotearoa, as well as a growing commitment in the wider Bahá'í community to greatly increase its understanding of te ao Māori and its taonga of mātauranga and reo.[4] Bound together by history and the bonds of love we advance.*

*Ideas flowed and learning was shared in the fields of social action and how we can best contribute to the discourses of society. There was a tangible feeling that we stand on the threshold of exciting developments in these areas.*

*With the certain knowledge of your unfailing guidance and prayers from the Sacred Threshold, we go forward from this Convention united, energised, focused and with renewed commitment to winning the goals of the Nine Year Plan. Beloved House of Justice, we send you our heartfelt love and gratitude.*

*Ehara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini. My strength is not as an individual but as a part of the collective.*

*Arohanui,*

**The National Convention of Aotearoa New Zealand 180 B.E.**

*[4] The Māori world and the treasures of its knowledge and language*

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## Information Technology (IT) Advisory Board

On 21 August 2023 the National Spiritual Assembly informed the community of the establishment of an IT Advisory Board which it considers a significant and important step to ensure the needs of the national community continue to be well served by technology.

The broad focus of the Board is oriented towards an IT approach based on the Bahá'í Internet Agency's guidance about use of technology—underscored by an understanding of the use and needs for technology at all levels (national, regional, local and grassroots), what is currently in place, and how the current technology is meeting these and future needs. In the long-term, it is intended that the Board will develop a framework for IT in Aotearoa that supports the building of capacity for planning and decision making around all IT matters, including compliance, security, and education of the community.

The National Assembly is confident the establishment of this Board will strengthen foundations for the communication and engagement of the national community and that it will play a pivotal role in guiding and enhancing our current IT capabilities.

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## Information Technology

As part of improving the IT infrastructure serving Bahá'í institutions in Aotearoa, a decision was made to move to the Microsoft 365 (MS365) platform, for use by Local Spiritual Assemblies and other institutions and agencies. During 2022 the National Office has been gaining experience with MS365. On 23 December 2022, an initial communication was sent to all users of "bahai.org.nz" email accounts outlining the anticipated process and some of the benefits and features of MS365. Users were invited to fill in a short survey to assist in understanding the needs of users. Another email about the changeover was sent on 30 March 2023 along with a FAQ document which answered some questions raised in the survey. On 2 June a further communication explained steps for logging into the new system after the move to the Microsoft 365 platform (on 10 June), that a small support team would be available during the weekend of 10-11 June and that there would be training sessions on Zoom offered the following week. On 9 June, further detailed instructions were shared including a document with instructions (and screenshots) about how to sign in to the Microsoft email account and set up Two-Factor Authentication, and a link to register for one of the two training sessions on Zoom on Wednesday 21 (at 12 noon) and Saturday 24 (at 7pm).

General assistance has continued to be offered by the National Office, while a support person was available in the first few months after the changeover by phone, online conference calling and email to resolve any specific difficulties that arose. Follow up emails provided additional information including a link to the recording of the Microsoft 365 training session held on Zoom on Wednesday 21 June. Topics covered in this session included: Using the online productivity applications (Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc); Creating a new file (agenda, minutes, statistics spreadsheet); Naming; Sharing files; Attaching files to email; Collaborating on a file; Organising OneDrive folders/files; Storing files and attachments; Finding files.

On 8 September, users were notified that a change had been made to the sharing settings for files and folders in OneDrive, so that the option to share with 'Anyone' would now be available. This setting is intended to be used ONLY for non-confidential material i.e. material that is suitable to be shared generally, including with members of the wider community. The IT Resource person will continue to assess any security risks that may arise from providing this additional flexibility. Another feature has also been implemented for those users who need to access the Google platform, so they can do so with more ease. Single sign-on (SSO) has been set up between the Google and MS365 platforms. SSO is an identification method that enables users to log in to multiple applications and websites with one set of credentials and streamlines the authentication process.

The National Spiritual Assembly expresses its sincere gratitude to Mr Babak Ivoghlian who continues to serve as the IT Resource person, providing timely and extensive expertise to all aspects of the work of the National Spiritual Assembly and National Office.

The National Convention website was transitioned to the Wordpress platform for National Convention 181 B.E.

### **Meeting with Mr Matt Weinberg, Program Director of the Bahá'í Internet Agency**

On 29 June 2023 an online meeting was held with Mr Matt Weinberg, Program Director of the Bahá'í Internet Agency. This had been planned as a combined in-person/online meeting at the National Office, but due to Matt being exposed to Covid risk, the meeting had to become online only. He joined from his Auckland hotel room.

Prior to the meeting Mr Weinberg shared three documents with the attendees:

1) Enhancing Capacity related to Baseline Information Technology Security - prepared by the Bahá'í Internet Agency (Last updated June 2021):

This document set out some important considerations relating to:

- Baseline Security and Capacity Framework: Initial assessment to be applied to systems, policies and protocols to support National institutions and offices, including Offices of External Affairs and any primary collaborators (particularly those that have access to information flows that contain sensitive or confidential data).
- Some Areas of Capacity Building (e.g. Capacity to articulate an information technology vision statement; Capacity to read reality and employ protection and risk analysis; Capacity to determine what information and communication technology is in scope in light of community growth and administrative complexity; Capacity to involve all

relevant stakeholders in definition of IT needs, especially desired functionality of tools and applications; Capacity to determine the value information and communication systems and assets (as it relates to confidentiality, integrity and availability); Capacity to carry out resource and financial analysis of information technology systems; Capacity to consult and take action upon more advanced security controls and policies).

2) On Technology and the Constructive Use of the Internet: Extracts from Messages Written on behalf of or approved by the Universal House of Justice.

3) The Internet and the Nine Year Plan: Some initial questions – Questions were posited under 3 sub-headings (On the use and impact of technology; Use of the Internet to advance the work of the Cause; Protection and Spiritual Health – Anticipating threats and challenges).

Representatives of various institutions and agencies attended including the Institution of Counsellors, National Spiritual Assembly, Auxiliary Board, Regional Bahá'í Councils, Regional Institute Boards, Spiritual Assemblies of Auckland and Christchurch, Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, National IT Resource person, Bahá'í National Reference Library, National AV Archives, Office of Public Affairs, Marque communications agency, and the National Secretariat.

The meeting touched on a range of interesting and timely topics, relating to technical capacity-building objectives in relation to the development of administrative systems during the Nine Year Plan, the use of the internet in relation to the Nine Year Plan and a broader perspective about how the Faith might conceive, develop, use and evaluate various technologies in support of the work of the Cause.

Mr Weinberg outlined the work and functioning of the Bahá'í Internet Agency, that it provides analysis and recommendations to senior institutions, and that the work has grown and is now supported by collaborators and teams, and in some cases through National Spiritual Assemblies, Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members. His main focus was exploring how we raise the capacity to think about the choices we make about technology. Below are just some of the points covered in the wide-ranging discussion.

- We raise the capacity to define what our technological needs are and how technology can be applied through reading the reality of the context, and using the approach of consultation, action, reflection, study, i.e. the approach to technology is coherent with the approaches to all our other endeavours.
- The Writings affirm that scientific and technological advancement uplift the world of being and are an



of rational inventive powers - the Writings refer to arts and sciences, craftsmanship and invention (Greek word technos refers to craftsmanship).

- We need to align with our values and aims, and the context where the technology is being applied.
- Technology scales our ability to do things, and amplifies efficiency, but at what cost in the relational aspect of human life?
- The three protagonists each have a role in relation to the appropriate use of technology, including the internet etc.
- Technology is a vehicle to augment human capacities so is not neutral therefore it is important to reflect on it. It changes the moral terrain in which decisions are made. It shapes society and evolves (e.g. industrial revolution). He used the example of Guttenberg's printing press which put the Bible in the hands of everyone and created literacy - which led to the transformation of Europe.

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## Support for Local Assemblies

The National Spiritual Assembly communicates regularly with Local Spiritual Assemblies, promptly sharing communications and resources received from the Bahá'í World Centre, providing guidance and resources to the national community, and responding to requests from Local Assemblies and/or individuals about specific matters.

In 180 B.E. two Gazettes were sent to all Local Spiritual Assemblies (in June and December) which addressed various topics including Assembly functioning and capacity building, sustaining full Assembly participation, resignations and by-elections during the year, koha and IRD considerations, encouragement to youth who are old enough to reaffirm their faith, application of principles to personal situations, deploying pioneers, privileges that are NOT denied to those without administrative rights, driving licences, possible barriers to the child protection accreditation process, and resilience during natural disasters.

On 20 October, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote to all Local Spiritual Assemblies encouraging each Local Assembly to take the necessary steps to create (or update) a robust emergency preparedness plan and shared an Emergency Preparedness Plan template to facilitate consultations. Local Assemblies were requested to share a copy of their plan with the National Assembly.

On 4 September 2023, a letter was sent to all Local Spiritual Assemblies about the seminars of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP); "Having such a

beautiful, well organised space for our young people, where focused and formalised learning occurs, is such a strength for our country, and has far-reaching implications for the development of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community... In this light, the National Spiritual Assembly urges all Local Spiritual Assemblies to "leave no stone unturned" in encouraging and supporting all students who are about to begin their tertiary studies to attend the seminars...". The National Assembly further advised that; "Local Assemblies should, whenever possible, be planning ahead in terms of supporting students to attend, including those who may have embarked on studies already but have yet to participate in the seminars. It is helpful to encourage and assist the young people and their families to plan ahead and budget for this annual space. An orientation towards nurturing your younger members, planning for their educational development and thinking about clearing away any barriers for them, is the mode of action that we encourage all Local Assemblies to strive to attain."

A robust process for tracking and monitoring minutes of Local Assemblies enables the National Assembly to assess the level of functioning of an Assembly, the vibrancy of community endeavours and any matters which may require following up or urgent attention.

The Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies is an online resource for the Bahá'í community, and specifically for those serving on Local Assemblies. It contains guidelines for Bahá'í administration in New Zealand, authoritative excerpts, as well as forms and documents for downloading. The link to the online Guidelines is: [guidelines.bahai.org.nz](https://guidelines.bahai.org.nz)

The material in the Fostering the Spiritual Health of a Local Bahá'í Community programme has been revised and will be run by Auxiliary Board members with a number of Local Spiritual Assemblies after the Ridván elections. The National Office will be printing the material into booklet form in due course. This is a joint endeavour with the other Arm of the Administration to build the capacity of Local Assemblies in fostering the spiritual health of their communities. The bulk of the work is being done by the Auxiliary Board members in conjunction with the Counsellor, and the National Assembly's role is one of support e.g. reviewing, editing and proof-reading the material, formatting and printing, and dispatching to Local Assemblies with encouragement to them to fully participate in this worthwhile endeavour.

The programme has been in abeyance over the past year or two while revisions were made in the context of the Nine Year Plan and with New Zealand examples, based on experience, inserted.

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## Health and Safety: Child Protection

The ‘Safeguarding the Interests of Young People’ training course for the protection of children and junior youth has been extensively promoted through a team of coordinators and facilitators, overseen by the Regional Institute Boards. The materials include a Training Manual, Handbook, Facilitator’s Manual and Branch Course (refresher course that individuals complete midway through their four-year accreditation).

The course is mandatory for all those aged 15 years and above who wish to supervise, care for, or teach children and young people at activities and events under the aegis of the Bahá’í institutions, and is part of the New Zealand Bahá’í community’s child protection accreditation process. This process must be completed every four years, along with police vetting and relevant assurances from institutions.

The training course is intended to contribute to the development of the community as a whole - individuals, families, groups and institutions - and is offered to all community members, irrespective of whether or not they intend to carry out acts of service directly associated with children or young people under the age of 18. It aims to raise consciousness in the community about the challenges and opportunities which face young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Incident reporting is becoming increasingly effective and timely, and all incidents are reviewed by the National Assembly on a 3-monthly cycle (if not requiring urgent consideration). Some incidents of a more serious nature have been reported, and institutions are learning to handle such cases in a mature and principled way.

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## Translations

It is the National Assembly’s ongoing hope that friends at the grassroots who are undertaking the study of institute courses and who have proficiency in Te Reo Māori can create interim translations of these important materials, or can further refine any current interim translations that have been drafted.



# Safeguarding the Interests of Young People

**Branch course, Unit 1: Reflecting on our endeavours**

Prepared under the auspices of the  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of New Zealand  
Te Rūnanga Wairua Tapu o ngā Bahá’í o Aotearoa  
*(v1.0, June 2023)*

# Community statistics

## Nga Tatauranga Hapori

Bahá'í population and locality information – data as of 4 April 2024

### Bahá'í population: Community membership

	Total in 180 B.E.	Total in 179 B.E.	Total in 178 B.E.
Children	359	374	389
Junior youth	124	140	133
Youth (15-20 years)	164	142	198
Adult men	1100	1101	1109
Adult women	1385	1380	1379
<b>Total believers</b>	<b>3132</b>	<b>3137</b>	<b>3208</b>

Children (1-11 years)

Junior Youth (12-14 years)

Note: The reduction in overall membership compared with last year is due to a number of factors, in addition to the deaths, emigrations, and resignations identified below. Two such factors are youth who have not reaffirmed, and those individuals whose whereabouts have been unknown for over three years being removed from current community membership lists.

### Bahá'í population: Changes

	Total in 180 B.E.	Total in 179 B.E.	Total in 178 B.E.
<b>Enrolments (adults and youth)</b>	16 (13 adults, 3 youth)	32 (25 adults, 7 youth)	24 (19 adults, 5 youth)
<b>Registrations (children and junior youth)</b>	7		
<b>Births</b>	7	11	13
<b>Marriages</b>	12	16	11
<b>Year of waiting granted</b>	4	0	1
<b>Passed to Abhá Kingdom</b>	16	23	18
<b>Resignations accepted</b>	4	5	11
<b>Sanctions applied (including partial)</b>	0	0	0
<b>Restoration of administrative rights</b>	1	2	0
<b>Transfers to New Zealand</b>	51	61	69
<b>Transfers from New Zealand</b>	38	57	32



## Status of localities

	Total in 180 B.E.	Total in 179 B.E.	Total in 178 B.E.
<b>Local Spiritual Assemblies</b>	40	40	38
<b>Groups</b>	21	19	19
<b>Isolated</b>	4 (Central Otago, Gore, Waitomo, Westland)	6 (Central Otago, Gore, Stratford, Southland, Waitomo, Westland)	6 (Central Otago, Gore, Rangitikei, Southland, Stratford, Westland)
<b>Unopened</b>	2 (Chatham Island, Mackenzie)	2 (Chatham Island, Mackenzie)	4 (Chatham Island, Mackenzie, Waimate, Whakatane)

## Community development

	Total in 180 B.E.	Total in 179 B.E.	Total in 178 B.E.
<b>No. of localities in which the Nineteen Day Feast is held</b>	51	51	50
<b>Estimated no. of believers who have attended the Nineteen Day Feast</b>	1028	1061	1042
<b>No. of localities that have observed one or more Holy Days</b>	45	46	49
<b>Estimated no. of individuals who have attended one or more Holy Days</b>	1028	1019	1310

## In Memoriam

A record of community members who have passed to the next world

He whakamaharatanga ki te hunga kua wheturangitia atu

He pūkete o ngā mema hapori kua hipa atu ki ngā ao e whai ake nei

### Passed away in 180 B.E.

*Names are listed in order of the date of their passing*

**Ani Horua Waiariki**  
**Latai Mailau**  
**Kawiti Naitoro**  
**Charles Lips**  
**Ian Goodfellow**  
**Diana Chambers**  
**John Booth**  
**Paul Way**  
**Zekrollah Abolghasemi**  
**Gary Ellis Corson**  
**Jan Tilley**  
**Margaret Bannerman**  
**Mary-Anne Westeneng**  
**Kathleen (Kathy) Gilbert**  
**Sione Dan Fa'avela**  
**Lavea Tupuola Sione Malifa**

### Passed away before 180 B.E.

*Recently confirmed*

**David Wilson**  
**David Wyeth**  
**Matasae Kauapa**  
**Kirsty Almao**

### Bahá'í visitors who passed away in New Zealand

*Names are listed in order of the date of their passing*

**Simione Koto**  
**Grant Stephen Papali'i Percival**

### Believers who had previously lived in Aotearoa

*Names are listed in order of the date of their passing*

**Mrs Badiéh Taefi - Australia**  
**Michael Collins**

# Words from the Supreme Body on the spiritual enterprise at this time Ngā kupu mai i te Tinana Matua i runga i te hinonga wairua i tēnei wā



To conclude, these recent words of the Universal House of Justice illumine our path.

*“As we have previously mentioned, today, the people of the world—and among them the people of Iran—share more than ever before many of your aspirations and ideals in their hopes, aims, and expectations for their collective future. The divers social strata of the world are longing, in heart and mind, for equality, justice, and a society built on moral and worthy human qualities. Beyond shared ideals and aspirations, however, the people of the world are also searching for effective and practical means for the betterment of society. But every political and economic school of thought is overwhelmed by and unequal to the scale, nature, complexity, and interconnectedness of the challenges; their proponents are themselves confounded and perplexed. Irrespective of the useful insights those schools of thought may contain, the assumptions underlying the present world order—from the nature and identity of the human being to perspectives related to power and competition—are inadequate for a humanity which today stands at the threshold of its collective maturity. The world is thus facing a profound and far-reaching crisis that is destabilizing and disrupting its order. Although this crisis is not new, and the reasons for it are not unknown to the people of Bahá, yet its destructive results and the consequent confusion are more apparent than at any time past. Bahá’u’lláh writes:*

*“We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy.”*

Universal House of Justice To the followers of the Greatest Name and the helpers of the Ancient Beauty in the sacred land of Iran, Naw-Rúz 181, Paragraph 5

*“Today, the spiritual duty and moral responsibility of every conscientious soul is to serve the cause of the peace and unity of the world. In this important undertaking, every member of the human family has a share. In purifying the heart and cleansing its mirror from prejudice on the one hand, and in creating the social conditions for peace and unity on the other, every individual has agency and the capacity to play a part. All souls are able to promote the culture of peace and unity in their interactions with friend and stranger alike. And in this day, such an intention will attract the confirmations of God. As a result souls come to inspire each other, increase their endurance in the face of difficulties, assist one another in dealing with problems, build amity and solidarity, and advance on a constructive path towards a bright future. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá thus states:”*

*“... peace must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace among nations. Wherefore, O ye Bahá’ís, strive ye with all your might to create, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals. This is your task.”*

Ibid, paragraph 8





