



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

Te Rūnanga Wairua Tapu o nga Bahá'í o Aotearoa

21 December 2020
11 Masá'il 177

To all our brothers and sisters in Auckland community

Tēnā koutou katoa! Ngā mihi aroha nui!

You will be aware that on the day of the Covenant this year, 25 November 2020, the beloved Universal House of Justice issued a significant message to the Bahá'ís of the world, setting before us a vision of a new series of Plans commencing at Ridván 2021 that will carry the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá'í Era. The message reminded us of the profound reflection we must undertake as individuals, communities and institutions, on the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre.

On that same day, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand was blessed to receive a letter from the House of Justice announcing that it is now possible for Auckland to participate in the further unfoldment of the Administrative Order – that Order which is destined to establish a divine civilisation upon earth, based on the power of the Covenant – through the establishment of a two-stage electoral process for the Local Spiritual Assembly.

The House of Justice wrote:

“You will no doubt recall that in its letter of 27 December 2005 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice anticipated the establishment of a two-stage electoral process for the election of Local Spiritual Assemblies in certain local communities where the size of the Bahá'í population and other circumstances would warrant this development. Indeed, such a two-stage election had its historical precedent in the system established at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's direction for the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tihván. Considering the significant advances that the Bahá'í community of Auckland has made in recent years within the framework of the Five Year Plan, as well as the relatively large number of adult believers that reside in that locality, the House of Justice feels that it would now be possible to institute a two-stage election of the Local Assembly in Auckland, starting at Ridván 2021. It is hoped that this step will greatly enrich the electoral process and enhance the participation of the friends in the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly.”



Significant Advances in Auckland

The honour that has been bestowed on Auckland is a testament to the noteworthy progress that has occurred in recent years. It is heartening to consider the advances in Auckland, including:

- The number of devotional meetings, children’s classes, junior youth groups and study circles has substantially increased and is now moving past 300 of these core activities;
- Centres of intensive activity, particularly Manurewa and Tamaki neighbourhoods, have grown strongly and continue to generate learning about the applications of the framework of the Plan;
- Auckland has become a reservoir of human and other resources for the country as well as a centre of learning for New Zealand, and beyond;
- Bolstered by the two bicentenary celebrations, the community has become more outwardly focused. It has embraced decentralised holy days and seen them as a way to connect many of our brothers and sisters to Bahá’u’lláh;
- Although not uniform across all sectors, the involvement of the generality of friends across the cluster is advancing;
- There is greater involvement of Māori particularly in parts of South and West Auckland;
- Experience is being gained in the ‘groups of families’ approach;
- The friends are coming to know their strengths and draw upon them in their planning and action;
- There is a firm grasp of the value of working in smaller groups;
- The unity and collaboration of the institutions and agencies serving Auckland has become stronger;
- The functioning of cluster agencies has advanced significantly;
- The Local Assembly is supported by a secretariat that is handling growing administrative complexity;
- The Local Assembly continues to direct some 50% of the community’s budget to expansion and consolidation.

The Two-Stage Election Process

We can convey to you the following outline of the process that will occur in the election of the Auckland Spiritual Assembly next Ridván, as outlined by the House of Justice in its letter to the National Spiritual Assembly:

“The election of a Local Spiritual Assembly using a two-stage process will be conducted in a manner similar to that of a National Spiritual Assembly, that is, the believers in a designated unit will elect delegates who, in turn will elect members of the Local Assembly from among all the adult believers in the entire locality. For now, the number of delegates will be 19,



which would be assigned in proportion to the adult Bahá'í membership of each unit. Auckland should be divided into electoral units, preferably in a way that would allow two delegates to be assigned to each, wherever this is possible.

“The election of the delegates can take place in the days preceding Ridván, starting from the first day of the month of Jalál, and the believers would be invited to attend a unit gathering to vote for the number of delegates assigned, from among the adult believers who reside in the unit...the entire process should be completed by the first day of Ridván, at which time an announcement would be made to the community of the nine believers elected to the Local Assembly.”

The voting members amongst you, that is those who are 21 years of age or over at the time of the election and who are enrolled members in good standing of the Bahá'í community, will all be eager to learn about the unit to which you are assigned, and we can assure you that this will be done as soon as possible.

Developing a “Deep Appreciation for the Spiritual Imperatives that Characterise Bahá'í Elections”

Although the procedural aspects will be of great interest to you, it is the spiritual nature of the Bahá'í electoral process that must be given the most emphasis in your preparations for the election. In its letter to the National Spiritual Assembly, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

“Beyond assisting the friends in the community to become familiar with the various procedural aspects of the two-stage election, you will no doubt wish to give thought as to how they can be helped to develop a deep appreciation for those spiritual imperatives that characterize Bahá'í elections. For many new believers, and even some long-standing Bahá'ís who have not actively participated in the life of the community, their understanding of the word “election” may largely derive from the political elections that take place in the country, and the various ideas and practices associated with them, most of which are, in profound ways, at variance with the Bahá'í approach. The movement of populations towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a New World Order demands a major shift in how the believers view authority within the community and how those who will exercise this authority are chosen. A point of departure is the fact that the believers do not seek positions on an institution by putting themselves forward and attempting to solicit votes; rather, free from any trace of ambition, they understand election to such a role as a call to service. Taking active part in the life of the community throughout the year, they use every opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with one another; thus they are able to consider prayerfully the range of believers for whom they can vote, and then select those who best combine the necessary qualities. Other important factors, such as age distribution, diversity, and gender, also need due consideration, so that the membership of the Assembly will be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements of the community. As the believers are assisted to develop a more profound understanding of Bahá'í elections, they will, when the time comes for them to vote at both stages, approach this duty in a prayerful attitude,



seeking divine guidance and confirmation. As Shoghi Effendi has advised, ‘they must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections.’”

As many of you would recall, the “necessary qualities” referred to by the House of Justice above, as conveyed by Shoghi Effendi, are the “qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience”.

The coming months, when we will all be striving to fulfil the goals of the Five Year Plan, will provide important opportunities to become acquainted with other believers in Auckland so that by the time April arrives you have given some consideration to those who “best combine” these “necessary qualities”.

Viewing this new step for Auckland community in the context of growth

The Auckland community has many strengths that will be drawn upon in the implementation of the two-stage election process. Ultimately, we need to be conscious that this process is one of learning about the transformation of populations. The role of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants will be critical in this preparatory process.

We have every confidence that the friends will welcome all opportunities that are provided to them for learning more about the election process and its underpinning spiritual dimensions, and to viewing this development as a part of the growth process.

Special privilege bestowed on Auckland community

It is significant that Auckland, being one of the first Local Assemblies in the western world to be established when it was first formed at Ridván 1926, will now have the experience of the two-stage electoral process as we enter the One Year Plan. As we embark on this significant enterprise and as the process unfolds in Auckland, this experience will contribute to a global process of learning, in which each of you will play your part.

Concluding Comments

This is a profoundly significant development for Auckland. Although it is being managed this first time by the National Assembly with the support of the Institution of the Counsellors, we can anticipate that the organisational aspects will be devolved to the Local Assembly itself in the future. In the meantime, the Local Assembly’s role in helping to establish the process in its community for this first time will be important.

The Auxiliary Board members who are based in Auckland and their assistants will play a key role in the educational process taking place from now until Ridván and we hope all of the friends will take every opportunity for deepening your insights into the rich spiritual elements that make up the Bahá’í



electoral process and which are a part of the Divine Civilisation we are endeavouring to construct against the backdrop of the “furious storms lashing humanity”.

Wholehearted participation by all eligible voters will hasten that day when the widespread troubles that the world is now facing will be a distant memory.

With heartfelt love and best wishes,

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand

Suzanne Mahon
Secretary

cc Counsellor Tessa Scrine; Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Auckland; Auxiliary Board members Siniva Sinclair and Jeffrey Sabour; Regional Bahá'í Councils of the North and South Islands