

Message from the National Spiritual Assembly

The National Spiritual Assembly shares its perspective on progress made and prospects ahead.

I**N A YEAR OF CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES**, the National Spiritual Assembly has nothing but deep admiration for the manner in which the institutions, agencies, individuals and community rallied to the needs of the hour, drawing upon the power of the Covenant, putting unity at the centre of everything, and adaptively utilising every opportunity to foster the growth and solidarity of the Faith in Aotearoa. The pandemic circumstances placed constraints on many activities, but the loving enthusiasm and adaptability shown by the friends to 'weather the storm' with composure and positivity, elicits our heartfelt gratitude.

Drawing on untapped potential

With Regional Bahá'í Councils and Local Spiritual Assemblies, the two training institutes and the myriad agencies associated with each region and cluster, all learning to systematically and diligently harmonise their efforts to draw on untapped potential and 'seek to overcome any obstacles that are impeding'* the growth of the Faith, there was considerable consolidation and capacity building occurring, to help prepare us all for the demands to come. The National Assembly expresses its profound gratitude to all these friends.

The decentralisation of many activities, including the summer schools, the use of internet technology when in-person gatherings were not recommended, and the patience, adaptability, and fortitude demonstrated during the ever-changing circumstances, meant that in general the friends maintained their equilibrium to undertake their engagement with, and service to, the Cause in ways that were creative and provided openings for new understandings to emerge about the dynamics of fostering community life and widening its embrace.

For a large portion of the year, the staff of the National Office — both secretariat and treasury — were required to work from home and did so conscientiously, keeping the functions of the Office operating to the extent possible, including the Bahá'í Distribution Service. Transportation limitations from overseas meant that the supply of literature into the country was curtailed somewhat, but the printing of many resources continued in-house. The National Assembly expresses its appreciation to its wonderfully devoted staff, including the ICT resource person, without whom the Office could not successfully function. We also acknowledge with deep gratitude the project managers for the massive renovation project at the Hyde Dunn property, to the hard working members of the Property Committee, the Office of Public Affairs and to all dear friends who labour quietly in the background, taking care of tasks that continue to strengthen the fabric of the Faith, and whose service is so valuable.

Overall, the One Year Plan was a period in which efforts were made to round off the remaining goals of the Five Year Plan (2016-21)[†], and to lay the groundwork for the new series of Plans that will comprise a 25 year span, of which the One Year Plan was the first. It was a momentous year in that it drew to a close a period of special potency associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's release of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, was the Centenary year commemorating His Ascension and was the first year of the third epoch of the Divine Plan. The Ridván message of 2021 told us that "the page is turned" and with the release of the 30 December 2021 message of the Universal House of Justice, addressed to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors taking place in the Holy Land at that time, the House of Justice has now shown us what is written on that page.

Onward march

It is clear that a profound shift will be needed to keep the continuity of our endeavours within the framework for action, while expanding our consciousness and action to allow a greater release of the society-building power. We know that the global health crisis and the conflict in Europe are just some of the crises that the world will face, but the Faith must continue its onward march towards the destiny that Bahá'u'lláh has ordained for it. Our focus and energies should be ever-more sharply directed towards this aim, knowing how sorely the world needs His Healing Remedy. We can anticipate a tumultuous period ahead in the life of humanity, but we have the power of the Covenant and are not confused — we are very clear about what we are doing. We know that the DNA of society building is within everything we do in our expansion and consolidation efforts, right from the first actions of the friends in their community-building efforts. In other words, inherent even in the most fledgling of efforts, the potential for society building is present, and its power is released as the community building grows and matures.

Humanity is looking for something to elevate the world from the turmoil it is experiencing. Paragraph 4 of the above-mentioned 30 December 2021 message will help all of us to shine a light on what Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation can offer humanity. The more we learn to describe this vision and to live this experience, the greater will be the light shed on the true aim of the activities we are engaged in, and how a new race of men is being raised up by the processes of the Divine Plan. And it will be the degree of intensity with which each individual, institution and community engages with this process, that will determine the degree to which the light of the Revelation is able to penetrate and suffuse society. This involves BOTH intense activity occurring in neighbourhoods as well as concerted effort being made by believers in all parts of the cluster. All elements have to continue to advance. Within whatever dimension we are operating, it is the degree of focus that will be key to ensuring that progress is rapid.

The coming year

The National Assembly's hope for the coming year is that the friends everywhere will give deep and thoughtful consideration to their life of service, and to reflecting on how each of us can give more time to service. In a few cases, this might be full-time service for a few years, but for most it will be endeavouring to put service at the centre of our lives to the extent possible. This will involve the critical requirement for all to rise to new heights of understanding about the educational content of the training institute, and the latent power within its limitless potentialities. The House of Justice has indicated that releasing the capacity of youth is the sacred charge of the institute, and the institute is the sacred charge of the youth. A profound, long-term commitment by the youth towards the training institute arises from a profound understanding of, and profound experience of interacting with, the training institute. This is something that the National Assembly looks forward to seeing in ever greater degrees.

The training institute engages hearts and minds, and assists everyone to think about a life of meaningful service. It is our hope that all friends will “fall in love” with the training institute through utilisation of the revised Ruhi Books 1 and 2 (‘Reflections on the Life of the Spirit’, and ‘Arising to Serve’). At the heart of everything are the basic building blocks of learning to maintain an ongoing conversation with another soul, of raising individual capacity through study and action, of learning to offer increasingly complex acts of service, and to find and appreciate the joy in all of this.

The National Spiritual Assembly is thankful for the blessing of a unified, devoted community in Aotearoa, that is widening its embrace to many other souls and is preparing for an ever-deeper engagement in the life of society. Alláh'u'Abhá!

* Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, 25 November 2020.

† See the national One Year Plan diagram on page 15, which outlines these goals.