

Energized to move forward on a path of service

From August 8 to 10, just outside Baltimore, Maryland, 115 youth from Delaware and Maryland participated in one of four regional youth gatherings convened by the [Regional Bahá'í Council of the Atlantic States](#).

At the same time 141 youth from the District of Columbia, Virginia and West Virginia joyfully convened in Arlington, Virginia for a similarly focused gathering. Participation from the greater community for both gatherings was 30% and 25% respectively.



Baltimore youth gathering participants

Last year the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the worldwide community of Bahá'ís, called for 114 conferences, spanning the globe, for those ages 15-30. The purpose of these conferences was to create a space for youth to engage in meaningful study, reflection and consultation on various topics related to the advancement of civilization. Some of the topics include the role of youth in society, how mutual support affects communities, defining the role of consultation in community and true friendship. Those attending the gatherings held in Baltimore and Arlington studied these themes mostly in a small group setting and at the close of the weekend, each small group made plans to put their insights into action in various ways upon returning to their home communities.

A participant in Baltimore, who did not attend last year's conference but for many months has supported classes for the spiritual education of children and junior youth in her community, shared a few insights she gained from her small group. She shared that making deeper connections with fellow participants was truly helpful. A goal her small group made was to strengthen the existing children's classes and junior youth groups by having weekly meetings to prepare lesson plans together.

A small group from Baltimore created plans to continue to meet regularly after the gathering, to create a space for meetings to enhance the devotional quality of their community and to establish classes for the spiritual education of young children.



A small group from the Arlington youth gathering using the arts to share their plans.

Three enthusiastic participants shared their reflections on the Arlington gathering. They expressed how much they enjoyed meeting new friends. They noticed a change in their participation from last year -- they knew more about what they were talking about. Their group had already set their goals before the gathering so they were conversing more about how to help one another. "This was a good reminder of our roles in society and clarified the meaning of community building for many. (It also) gave an opportunity for some of us to re-evaluate our lives and understand our real priorities better."

At the close of the gatherings, most of the participants were renewed with spiritual energy and prepared to take an active role in their neighborhoods and their local communities.

Another gathering was held in Cary, North Carolina, from August 15 to 17. The last of the four youth gatherings will be held in Monteagle, Tennessee in late September.