

Regional Bahá'í Council of the Atlantic States

Delaware • District of Columbia • Maryland • North Carolina • Virginia

August 6, 2018

To: The Bahá'ís and Their Friends in the Atlantic Region
Re: United Effort to Raise the Devotional Character of Our Communities:
1500 Regular Devotional Gatherings by October 2019

Beloved Friends and Co-workers:

We greet you warmly as we approach the midpoint of this most audacious Five-Year Plan.

Against the backdrop of a divided and decaying society, we are working to build vibrant, diverse and unified communities open to all -- beacons of love and unity, "the last refuge of a tottering civilization". As we labor, we gain experience and understanding of what it means to build spiritual community. And with each step, we develop greater capacity to be more effective in our work.

One of the most important capacities needed to build these vibrant, spiritual communities is that of creating welcoming and attractive spaces for collective worship. In 1996, when the Universal House of Justice set us on a 25 year series of plans to learn about community building, they wrote that "the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour" involving "the practice of collective worship of God". It was, therefore, "essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers". Since that time, we have received regular guidance from the House of Justice on the vital importance of not only multiplying devotional gatherings, but enhancing their spirit and potency as well. We now understand that these meetings for worship are "not merely activities to be multiplied but fundamental aspects of Bahá'í community life intended for all."

In its latest Ridvan Message to the Bahá'í World, the Universal House of Justice celebrates the appearance of local and national Houses of Worship throughout the world and reminds us that these "beacons" are built upon the foundation of community building activity at the local level. "For in their acts of service, especially in their regular devotional gatherings, Bahá'ís everywhere are laying the spiritual foundations of future Houses of Worship."

With all this in mind, your Regional Bahá'í Council--together with the Regional Training Institute Board, Counselor Farah Guchani-Rosenberg, and our beloved Auxiliary Board Members--call all the lovers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh throughout the Atlantic Region to raise the number of regular devotional gatherings in the region to 1500 by the Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb in October 2019. With approximately 450 regular devotional gatherings taking place in the region at this time, we believe that such a consecrated, unified and focused effort to develop a culture of collective worship will allow for the release of the spiritual forces necessary to propel us towards the achievement of the goals of the current Five-Year Plan.

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Anyone can host a devotional meeting, Bahá'ís as well as friends of the Faith. It is simply a matter of scheduling in one's life a regular space for collective worship. Let it start simply with your family gathering regularly for prayer. Let it develop by inviting a friend or acquaintance to join this space. As experience grows, the conversation that naturally flows can lead towards the life and teachings of the Twin Manifestations, or towards an invitation to a study circle. Later, perhaps the hosts of devotional meetings can gather together and share their experiences and learning. Imagine how much we can learn together about this vital aspect of community life while raising the spiritual consciousness of our communities!

To sustain the spiritual dynamic necessary to build community, there needs to be a regular rhythm in collective worship. A single devotional gathering can be a spark, but having a regular devotional gathering can become a fire. So what is meant by "regular"? The meaning of this will be different for each individual or family, depending on their own particular circumstances. For some, it could be weekly; and for others, bi-weekly. Some will host on a monthly basis, while for others, it could be less frequent. What is most important is that we take that "first step", with the intention of having a regular rhythm to the gathering we are hosting. As time goes on and experience grows, this space can become more and more regular and frequent. The Council suggests that we strive for a rhythm that is at least as frequent as monthly, although all efforts are valuable contributions to the goal.

Although we are striving towards a numerical goal, this endeavor is truly about developing a culture of collective worship and service -- one where the hearts and souls of diverse people and personalities are more and more bound together to overcome the oppression of a decaying society, and create the conditions for building the world anew, home by home, neighborhood by neighborhood. Each of us already knows the power of individual prayer to transform our inner lives and bring us closer to our Creator. There is no doubt that collective prayer has that same power to transform entire communities.

In the Ridvan 2018 Message, the House writes: "Though separated from our own time by two centuries, the society in which the Báb appeared resembles the present-day world for the sense of oppression and for the longing of so many to find answers to slake the soul's thirst to know". In sharing this with us, the House of Justice reminds us to continually draw inspiration and courage from the heroic examples of the Báb and his intrepid followers, calling to mind their qualities of "fearlessness, consecration and detachment from all save God." What more fitting gift can we collectively lay at the threshold of the Báb than achieving and sustaining 1500 regular devotional gatherings in celebration of the Bicentenary of His Birth?

With great love and hope,

REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL of the ATLANTIC STATES