10-19-05 Impact of Growth..txt

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THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

19 October 2005 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

Dear Baha'i Friends,

As indicated in our message to you dated 21 July 2005, the Universal House of Justice was pleased to learn of your interest in drawing upon the experience of the Baha'i world in meeting the administrative challenges associated with large-scale expansion. At its request, the International Teaching Centre has prepared the enclosed statement summarizing the lessons learned to date in this regard, which, it is hoped, will assist you in your consultations on the subject. In reviewing the points examined in this thoughtful document, the House of Justice has taken the opportunity to consider a number of issues related to the efforts of your community to pursue the aim of the Five Year Plan. Deliberate steps have been taken by your Assembly in recent months to focus the energies of the friends on the two movements that lie at the heart of the Plan, and the prospects for further impressive achievements by Ridvan 2006 look bright. To reinforce these positive developments and to assist you in extending the scope of your determined efforts, the House of Justice has instructed us to convey to you the following comments.

The promising pattern of action emerging in clusters throughout the world integrates individual initiative and community endeavor in order to embrace an ever-wider circle of people and teach receptive souls. This pattern appears wherever a sizable number of individuals who are moving through the sequence of institute courses make a conscious effort to translate what they are learning into action, undertaking specific acts of service that challenge them to draw upon the knowledge and insights they are gaining and to sharpen the skills and abilities they are developing through the courses. One of the most noteworthy outcomes of the institute courses is the emergence of an ever-increasing number of tutors who, having themselves studied the courses and struggled to walk a path of service, engage others in the study of the sequence, instilling in them the same desire to arise and serve. In this way, a broad base is laid for universal participation, which remains one of the most fundamental goals of the Baha'i community. You have, yourselves, witnessed this development in the few clusters that have reached an advanced stage of growth.

You have, likewise, observed how the conditions thus created in such clusters have made it possible to launch intensive programs of growth, in which large numbers of friends eagerly participate in the learning that takes place through

successive cycles of activity seeking to integrate well-coordinated collective action with effective individual initiative. And you are equally aware of how interaction among three entities,„the institute, the Auxiliary Boards, and the Area Teaching Committee,„in close collaboration with responsive Local Spiritual [2] Assemblies, can help carry the friends from one cycle to another and accelerate the learning process.

Having come to a good understanding of the dynamics of the development of human resources, the advancement of learning through progressive cycles of a growth program, and the requisite administrative action by institutions and agencies involved at the cluster level, you now need to help the American Baha'i community focus its energies increasingly on fostering them. If some two to three hundred clusters were to achieve the level of activity already reached in the Austin and Broward clusters, the present rate of enrollments could multiply tenfold. This is not an abstract possibility, but a practical objective that lies well within your grasp.

Commitment to establishing sound intensive programs of growth in a realistic number of clusters across the nation should provide the basis for addressing the many questions associated with the necessary adjustment of your administrative and financial affairs to meet the challenges of massive expansion. The situation today is not unlike the one you faced in the 1970s when, in the ferment of tumultuous social conditions, and as a result of fresh approaches to teaching, the membership of the American Baha'i community tripled in only a few years. The demands of growth necessitated a dramatic change in the administration of the community, and a vastly augmented National Center emerged, one that served as a hub for a vibrant network of committees, departments, and programs. This administrative arrangement, complemented by a few modest enhancements, has served the community admirably for over three decades. The Universal House of Justice feels that an effort of similar magnitude may well be needed to put in place administrative mechanisms that will support the work of the community during the next stage of its development. In considering the nature of these mechanisms, you will want to bear certain points in mind.

With learning about the nature of growth unfolding so rapidly at the grassroots, programs related to the expansion and consolidation of the Faith can best be managed at the regional or cluster level to ensure they evolve in accordance with practical experience. The efforts of national agencies should be examined to determine whether they overlap with the responsibilities granted to agencies at those levels. Where redundancies occur, the programs of national agencies may need to be modified significantly, or perhaps be eliminated altogether, so as to avoid creating confusion, diffusing focus, or dividing participation among an array of programs which, no matter how valuable in themselves, would end up at cross purposes, competing for the limited time and energies of the believers.

Consider, for example, the multiplication of children's classes. You have already made modifications to your institutional arrangements for this purpose,

and these must be carefully monitored to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The regional institutes are charged with responsibility for the implementation and management of the classes, and they require a wide degree of latitude to train the teachers, deploy resources, and collaborate with Local Spiritual Assemblies. The work of the regional institutes is being complemented by a national effort to provide curriculum and make available resource persons. However, if collaboration between the institutes and the National Children's Education and Research Center is not close, or if teachers in the clusters are directed from the national level, bypassing the institutes, the methodical expansion of classes for children, including the outreach to the wider community, will be severely impeded.

[3] Likewise, the spiritual empowerment of junior youth and their older peers is best addressed by an institute working in the context of an intensive program of growth. An example is the Project Badi in Florida which involved some forty youth during July of this year. In a setting of this kind, training and practice are combined, enhancing the capacities of the youth. Not only do they contribute directly to the activities of a cycle of a growth program, but they return to their home communities transformed by their summer experience, eager to serve in their schools and clusters throughout the year. This experience, if repeated over a series of summers, could well equip youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for a lifetime of effective action in the teaching field. Should the number of such projects multiply along with intensive programs of growth, it is not unreasonable to assume that the youth will take their rightful place in the forefront of the processes of the Plan, attract their peers to the Cause, and revitalize the community with an influx of young people. In such an effort, the basic sequence of institute courses constitutes the curriculum for the youth. Though certainly they will broaden their study of the Faith in a number of other ways, a parallel national program for their education would sap the strength of grassroots endeavors and leave them ineffectual.

Plans to reach specific populations„Hispanics, Muslims, etc.„with the Message of Baha'u'llah and bring them into the ranks of His followers, too, are most fruitful when they are administered and directed at the cluster level, close to where the learning is taking place. Such an approach seems to be confirmed by your experience with the national media campaign, the effectiveness of which improved markedly when it became more closely aligned with plans of action at the level of the cluster.

While certain national programs may require significant modification or, quite likely, be brought to a close, others may need to be reconceptualized so that they can better reinforce the processes unfolding at the cluster level. The work of agencies such as the Office of Education and Schools or the Office of Assembly Development may be enhanced by this kind of a review. Your deliberations in this respect may also need to extend to the mandate of the National Teaching Committee. Since the establishment of the Regional Baha'i Councils several years ago, your National Teaching Committee has conducted a

range of formal studies on issues pertaining to the role of religion in the wider community, as well as on certain aspects of Baha'i community life. In addition to this, however, increasing efforts have been made over the past year to evaluate the results of the Five Year Plan through case studies and the detailed analysis of data of various kinds. As the National Teaching Committee strengthens in this way its capacity to systematize the lessons being learned through the action and reflection of the friends in communities scattered across the country, it will be able to offer the knowledge gained to the institutions at all levels and lend further impetus to the movement of clusters nationwide.

All of this, of course, has implications for the disposition of your financial resources. The allocations you have provided this year to the Councils and regional institutes are highly commendable. Despite contributions made directly by the friends for the work at this level, where self-reliance in support of the material needs of activities and projects is most meritorious, the demands placed upon the National Fund are likely to increase further as the number of intensive programs of growth multiplies significantly. Yet, as noted in your comments to the Counsellors that accompanied your proposed budget for 2005-6, most of your resources are directed towards fixed expenses. As you consider the implications for change inherent in the structural adjustments discussed above, you will no doubt find the practical means to ensure the uninterrupted flow of funds required at the grassroots.

[4] The American Baha'i community stands at an important historical juncture. The insights emerging from its own experience, as well as the entire Baha'i world, endow it with the capacity to reach unprecedented levels of activity. The burden falls on you and the Counsellors to exercise wise leadership to ensure this capacity is fully developed. The Universal House of Justice will offer continued prayers at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf.

With loving Baha'i greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

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