

5 July 1989

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To all Members Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe

Dearly loved co-workers,

Since the International Teaching Centre has been encouraging the formation of teaching groups as one of the means to greatly increase the number of new believers in Europe, we felt it would be useful to share some understandings about the nature of such groups. These guidelines have been developed as a result of the experience with this concept in other areas of the world. It might be useful to share these with the Auxiliary Board members, who can in turn share them with their assistants.

First, it is necessary for all to realize that the primary means by which victories are won is the degree to which individual initiative is exercised. So important is individual initiative that the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice protects it. Institutions of the Faith can guide, but great teaching successes are attracted through individual resolve to arise enthusiastically and persist. Ideally, Local Spiritual Assemblies and teaching committees would be relieved of the burden of excessive planning if individuals were coming to them offering themselves and their teaching projects. The first concept of this plan to work in groups is the conviction that individuals will arise. The team is not an administrative body but rather a group of friends trying grow, spiritually and numerically.

The second concept is consultation. Believers should be lead to understand that consultation applies to our everyday life. It is not just the administrative bodies that consult; the friends have a need to consult. As the Universal House of Justice mentioned at the time of the release of a compilation on teaching in March 1977:

"While the friends are generally conscious for the vital importance of teaching, yet, because of their frailties, many for the most part lack confidence, and feel they do not know what course of action to follow, or how to bring their efforts to a conclusion."

By consulting together, fears, misgivings and any sense of inadequacy can be cast aside, the group can set their own goals and then, together or each one alone, work for achievement of the goals.

The third concept is that energy must be focused. We analyze what is needed and give it general encouragement but then we must go with each other into the field of action. The teaching focus of a group after consultation could be on a particular segment of their city, an age group, a place where people gather, a school or university, people at work, or a special interest group. Projects which are short-term foster immediate action. For example, a group in one

country, after consultation, decided that because they enjoyed poetry they should form a poetry appreciation group. They invited a number of their non-Baha'i friends, who had the same interest, to join them. Some of the inspiring poetry shared was the Creative Word of God from the Bab and Baha'u'llah. In a short span of time, these friends of the Baha'is recognized Baha'u'llah and the group doubled in size. Energy must be concentrated on a population and directed to a specific activity. This demonstrates one of the values of this concept because it is easier to grow when you are small, that is, a group of five can easily grow to ten. If there were many such groups, the Faith would be expanding rapidly. Often energy and spirit can be lost in the administration of large, long-term efforts with unrealistic expectations.

The fourth concept is that real growth is spiritual growth. The number of new people becoming Baha'is can be considered as a reflection of the internal growth of the group itself. Therefore, groups need to enthusiastically pursue a process of spiritualization. However, it must be understood that spiritualization cannot occur by a deepening process outside of teaching initiatives; the two must go together. Reflection and action are interdependent. Spiritual growth does not happen by intellectual exercise. If people act without prayer, reflection or consultation, their results will not be fruitful.

The fifth concept is the conviction that were we to act upon the summons to the field of action issued by the House of Justice to "every individual believer -- man, woman, youth and child", large numbers of individuals would enter the Cause. The focus of the group should be such that when souls are encouraged to contemplate their acceptance of Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God, they will be able to do so in a positive atmosphere of invitation. This atmosphere can be greatly enriched by a consciousness on everyone's part that we are constantly surrounded by the confirmations of the Holy Spirit and that if we supplicate to the martyrs and heroic teachers of the past, they will come to our assistance. This is a movement of spiritual forces, forces which are real and which will open doors.

With loving Baha'i greetings,
Signed: International Teaching Centre

— 5 July 1989