

Training Institutes

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TRAINING INSTITUTES

A document prepared for and approved by
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The Four Year Plan calls for a significant advance in the process of entry by troops to be supported and sustained by the systematic development of human resources. In the messages of the Universal House of Justice on the Plan, the training institute is envisaged as an instrument crucial to this development. The purpose of the present document is twofold. On the one hand, it offers an overview of the efforts thus far made by the worldwide Baha'i community to establish institutes; on the other, it reviews their accomplishments to date and explores their possibilities for further development and potential effect on the process of entry by troops. Passages from the relevant guidance given by the House of Justice provide the framework for the study undertaken. The document is divided into three sections:

1. AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

2. ENHANCEMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

2.1 Institutes in small communities with a large percentage of knowledgeable believers

- Teacher training programmes
- Instruments of teaching

2.2 Institutes in communities which witnessed large-scale expansion prior to the Plan, but whose human resources remained exceedingly low

2.3 Institutes in communities which, having experienced large-scale expansion, had already acquired some capacity for training prior to the Plan

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1. AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

In the two years since the launching of the Four Year Plan, considerable progress has been made in raising the friends' awareness of the need for training. As a result, the rigorous and methodical study of the writings, a habit that required reinforcement in many communities, has assumed prominence. This is a welcome development, but more has to be accomplished before the implications of systematic training are fully grasped. The Universal House of Justice explains:

"With the growth in the number of enrolments, it has become apparent that such occasional courses of instruction and the informal activities of community life, though important, are not sufficient as a means of human resource development, for they have resulted in only a relatively small band of active supporters of the Cause. These believers, no matter how dedicated, no matter how willing to make sacrifices, cannot attend to the needs of hundreds, much less thousands, of fledgling local communities. Systematic attention has to be given by Baha'i institutions to training a significant number of believers and assisting them in serving the Cause according to their God-given talents and capacities." +F1

In many parts of the world, attention is focused largely on gaining an understanding of the fundamental verities of the Faith. The corresponding institute programmes cover a wide range of subjects aimed at deepening the friends' knowledge of various aspects of the teachings. To be effective in developing human resources, these programmes need to impart knowledge, provide spiritual insights, and endow the participants with skills and abilities of service. In the messages on the Four Year Plan, the House of Justice has made a number of statements on the nature of training, and the variations in wording lend perspective on this complex matter:

"The purpose of such training is to endow ever-growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number of people--adults, youth and children." +F2

"It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow." +F3

"They [training institutes] will help to develop in each participant a deep love for Baha'u'llah, a good understanding of His essential Teachings and an awareness of the importance of developing the spiritual life of each individual through prayer, meditation and immersion in the Sacred Writings. They will also cover such practical matters as how to teach the Faith, for there are too many who, for lack of confidence in their ability to do so, are hesitant to convey the Message." +F4

"Your participation in institute programmes, through which you will deepen your

knowledge of the Faith, cultivate your inner spiritual lives and develop abilities of service, will enable you to intensify

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your individual and collective exertions in the teaching field and will result in a commensurate acceleration in the expansion of your communities." +F5

"They [institute programmes] should seek to develop in the participants a good understanding of Baha'u'llah's essential Teachings and to help them acquire those skills and abilities that will enable them to serve the Faith effectively. They should also strive to imbue their hearts with a deep love for Baha'u'llah --a love from which stems a desire to submit oneself to His Will, to obey His laws, to heed His exhortations and to promote His Faith." +F6

"These centres of Baha'i learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love." +F7

Passages such as these define a clear purpose for training institutes. The experience of the past two years indicates that when institute programmes fulfil this purpose through curricula that properly integrate the various components of training, the number of those who dedicate themselves to the work of the Faith increases dramatically.

2. ENHANCEMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Most national communities have taken the necessary initial steps to establish one or more training institutes in their countries. Boards or committees to oversee the operation of the institutes have been appointed. Patterns of cooperation between the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies in this vital area of activity have been adopted. Working relationships between Auxiliary Board members and the institutes have not proven difficult to build. By now, institutes in almost all countries have successfully conducted a few training sessions. Some are at the stage of offering regular courses to relatively small groups, while others have gone further to establish elaborate systems to reach large numbers. To significantly enhance the institutional capacity of each national community so as to impart spiritual education to ever-increasing contingents of believers is a challenge that requires persistent attention. In a memorandum to the International Teaching Centre, the House of Justice explains:

"From the various reports received at the World Centre, it is clear that a great deal of institutional capacity needs to be created in most national communities for training on a large scale. In many countries, offering regular courses to relatively small groups of believers is a formidable challenge. The Counsellors with the encouragement of the International Teaching Centre will need to devote considerable energy to helping national communities progress step by step along the way, if the believers of capacity in the villages and

towns of the world are to receive training and we are to witness the kind of development in the Faith for which we hope." +F8

The greatest progress in this direction has been made in those national communities which have concentrated on the execution of programmes, not allowing themselves to be diverted from action by lengthy discussions of theoretical matters. Their institutes have expeditiously chosen a series

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of courses with the best methods and materials available to them, trained teachers, and set out to build their systems of delivery in the process of implementation:

"In this connection, it brought the House of Justice much satisfaction to note in the programme proposal for the development of human resources, sent to the World Centre in December, that a sequence of a few basic courses had already been defined, which would be conducted using available materials. In this way, emphasis could be placed on the execution of the programme. The House of Justice is concerned that much time will be lost if the programme coordinator is now asked to devote attention to ensuring that the institute offers courses to cover a wide range of training requirements. What is needed at this stage is to train scores of facilitators in how to conduct the first few courses, so that they can offer them in the villages and towns throughout the country, enabling thereby hundreds and eventually thousands to enter the institute's programme. Such a task is, in and of itself, formidable and will require tremendous focus and concentration on the part of the institute." +F9

The following extract from a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to an individual believer also addresses this point:

"That after so many years of constant effort throughout the Baha'i world methods and approaches have been found to train at least a certain number of believers enrolled from among the receptive masses themselves--to deepen their knowledge of the Teachings of the Faith and to help them acquire skills and abilities to serve it effectively--is no small accomplishment, and these methods and approaches should now be fully exploited and utilized more extensively. Therefore, the emphasis on the establishment and operation of training institutes in the Four Year Plan is not only the expression of a great need in the Faith but also an acknowledgement of the capacity within the worldwide Baha'i community to meet it on a large scale." +F10

Three patterns can be discerned according to which institutional capacity for training seems to be developing in the Baha'i world.

2.1 Small communities with a large percentage of knowledgeable believers

One pattern is generally associated with countries where the number of knowledgeable believers in a rather small Baha'i population is relatively high. Most of the communities in Western Europe fall into this category. The approach adopted by their institutes is for the boards to determine what courses should be offered and call upon individuals to design and deliver them. Depending on

the size of the country, courses are held in a central place or repeated in various localities.

There is no doubt that this pattern, if carefully applied, will lead to a significant increase in human resources. To gradually develop an educational organization which offers a variety of courses to a larger and larger student body clearly enhances institutional capacity in any national community. Like institutes everywhere, those in this category will become strengthened as they learn how to motivate, guide and assist their teachers; to attract a steadily growing number of students; and to administer their courses with efficiency.

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For this development to be meaningful, however, a great deal of work has to be done on programme content. The purpose of training, as outlined in the messages of the House of Justice, is not realized by simply making it possible for some of the friends to offer courses on their favourite subjects to groups of interested believers.

Teacher training programmes

What is required of these institutes, then, is to identify in consultation with a group of collaborators the real needs of their national communities and address these in well-designed programmes. Given the aim of the Plan, such needs are intimately related to opportunities for growth in the country. A letter written on behalf of the House of Justice underscores the role of such institutes in the promotion of teaching:

"The House of Justice was heartened to note your goals related to teaching and hopes that you will give special consideration to the measures which can immediately be taken towards the achievement of a progressive increase in the number of individual enrolments. In this regard, it will be of particular importance that the friends are encouraged to arise and teach the Faith with ever greater determination and courage, and the continued development of your national training institute will be instrumental in this effort. At this stage in the growth of your community, the institute should consider as its primary task the offering of courses that seek to endow the friends with the knowledge, spiritual insights, and skills needed not only to proclaim the Cause, but to guide new souls to Baha'u'llah's Revelation." +F11

As they strive to work in this way, these institutes face a difficulty inherent in their communities' lack of experience in large-scale expansion, experience upon which they could draw to design appropriate curricular elements. While their present strength enables them to formulate with relative ease courses which impart knowledge of the Faith or examine spiritual and social issues, they struggle with the content of teacher training programmes that would offer practical advice and insights. Utilizing materials developed in other parts of the world, where such experience exists, helps overcome this difficulty. The long-term solution, however, is for the appropriate institutions to establish systematic teaching plans that are approached with an attitude of learning. Training and teaching, then, become two parallel processes that fuel each

other: Training courses raise the enthusiasm of the friends for teaching and help them acquire the necessary skills. Increased experience in the teaching field is reflected in the constantly improving content of training courses.

Instruments of teaching

Another dimension of institutional capacity that needs to be explored more vigorously by these institutes is their role as direct instruments of teaching:

"The Universal House of Justice received with great pleasure a copy of the first quarterly report of the board of directors of your national training institute. It was particularly heartened to note that the board is approaching its tasks with an open attitude towards learning, fully cognizant of the need to make decisions about the content and methods of the institute programme, to

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implement them, to reflect on the results, and to make adjustments in the light of experience. Through such an approach, your institute will succeed in gradually increasing its capacity to develop the human resources of the Bulgarian community.

"Since your community is relatively small, the board may wish to consider, as it continues to learn from experience, designing some courses which could be open to Baha'is and non-Baha'is alike. In addition to attracting thoughtful people to the Cause, such courses could also be a means of confirming them in the Faith and increasing the number of Baha'u'llah's faithful followers in your country." +F12

Given the growing interest among the public in social and spiritual issues, courses open to non-Baha'is could easily address such topics as the meaning of spirituality in a modern world, moral leadership, the spiritual education of children and youth, the dynamics of prayer, the nature of the soul and the afterlife.

2.2 Communities of large-scale expansion with extremely limited human resources

A second pattern is emerging mostly in countries which witnessed large-scale expansion prior to the Four Year Plan, but whose human resources remained exceedingly low. Here, the focus of institutes is on conducting courses of fixed duration, running from a few days up to several weeks, covering a set of basic deepening topics and assisting the participants in acquiring some skills. Groups of 20 to 30 are usually brought to a central place and trained, in the hope that they will return and strengthen their local communities. For these institutes, learning how to offer a course to group after group and to keep them enthusiastic day after day is in itself a significant step. It is heartening to see that a number of them are rapidly acquiring the capacity to accomplish this task.

In the context of entry by troops, however, institutes that conduct courses only at a central location have clear limitations. In a country of several thousand believers where a small group carries much of the weight of the work of the Faith, an institute course of a few weeks' duration, repeated four or

five times a year, may double or triple the number of workers in the field. But this does not provide the human resources to set in motion a sustainable process of accelerated growth. Once an institute passes through such a first stage, then, it must face the challenge of reaching a greater number of believers. In several countries in this category, the friends are already aware of this need, but for them to acquire the necessary level of institutional capacity is not proving to be easy. In this connection, the following guidance was offered by the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre:

"Now that many institutes have passed through the initial stage of establishment, the Counsellors can help increase their efficiency by bringing to their attention the need to reach larger and larger numbers of students with their courses. It would be a poor use of limited financial resources for an institute with a budget which includes remuneration for several full-time staff to offer a few courses to a handful of believers year after year. But even in

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this case, an indicator such as the cost per student per course would have to be used carefully. Early on, as institutes are learning how to attract students and offer courses, it is to be expected that such costs would run relatively high."+F13

Since bringing a very large number of believers to one central location for the purpose of training would be unmanageable, other alternatives have to be found. One option is for the institute to establish branches in different regions, a possibility mentioned in the messages on the Four Year Plan. For some institutes, the creation of one or two branches is feasible at this stage. To operate many such centres, each with its own facilities and administrative structure, however, would be beyond the financial means of most communities:

"The primary challenge before you is to help hundreds and then thousands of the believers in Haiti to enter your institute programme and study a well-defined sequence of courses. Clearly, you cannot accomplish this by inviting them all to one central location. Of course, it would be possible to establish one or more branches of your national institute. However, any scheme designed to reach a significant number of students by establishing many such centres, each with its own facilities and administrative structure, would be prohibitively expensive."+F14

It is becoming clear, then, that these institutes need to find more innovative ways to expand their coverage.

2.3 Communities of large-scale expansion with some prior capacity for training

A third notable pattern is unfolding in several national communities which, having experienced large-scale expansion, had already acquired some capacity for training prior to the Four Year Plan. The system being established in these communities, either by a national institute or a nationally coordinated network of regional institutes, has four components: a sequence of courses with

well-prepared material distributed to every student, a small study circle usually composed of eight to ten people, a facilitator or tutor trained to teach the courses, and some scheme of coordination, both at the national and regional levels.

Sequence of courses

As experience is gained worldwide, various sequences of courses will undoubtedly be developed responding to the requirements of diverse sectors of society. No one should underestimate the complexity of the task of defining each sequence and elaborating the materials. These have to adhere to some logic, if they are to succeed in raising up the needed human resources. Simply to compile a list of topics the friends should study, in the light of the guidance available in the writings, is not difficult. The order in which these topics should be presented, their correlation with the acquisition of skills to perform acts of service, and the way their study should be combined with the cultivation of inner perfection are matters of pedagogy that can best be discovered through systematic educational experience. For example, understanding the principles that govern the establishment and functioning of the Local Spiritual Assembly is of the utmost importance for every Baha'i. One must ask, however, whether a course on this subject is effective when offered to believers whose knowledge of the Faith is extremely limited and who have

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not yet studied those spiritual truths that shape Baha'i identity. It is noteworthy that, in practice, when institutes ignore the relevant pedagogical principles they fail to maintain the interest of the students, and the level of attendance in their courses falls.

Study circles

Before the second component of the system, namely, the study circle, is examined, it should be noted that training institutes are not in charge of deepening the entire community; their task is to focus on a percentage of the believers who are eager to learn and willing to teach and deepen others. In response to an institute proposal which included goals aimed at reaching the majority of the believers, the following was stated in a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice:

"The House of Justice was particularly heartened to see from your proposal that you intend to form "study circles" of six to ten believers in the towns and villages throughout the country, who will go through a series of basic courses together with a tutor. Through such an approach, you hope to reach large numbers with your institute programme. It feels, however, that the numerical goals that you have set, beginning with the third year of the institute's operation, are too high. It should be remembered that the purpose of the institute is to raise up a certain percentage of the friends as human resources, who, in turn, will teach and deepen the majority of the believers. Once you have attained the goals for the first two years, which are themselves ambitious but achievable, then you can evaluate the situation and set realistic

goals for the third and fourth years." +F15

Institutes in this category try to identify in each locality eight to ten of the more capable believers, usually young people with some formal education, and then to help them progress through the selected sequence of courses. This has proven possible, even when the generality of the believers are illiterate.

In working with such groups, institutes have learned to avoid two extremes: underestimating the abilities of the friends and sacrificing depth to an inordinate desire for simplicity, on the one hand, and, on the other, expecting too much and overlooking the need to adjust the pace of the courses to the educational level of the participants.

In those countries where the system described here is taking shape, much is being learnt about how to motivate and maintain study circles over an extended period of time. It is becoming clear, for example, that they must undertake extra-curricular activities, particularly in the realm of cultural enrichment.

Further, although a group may continue to study with the same tutor through the entire sequence of courses, it seems best for each course to have an official beginning and an event celebrating its successful completion. Some formality is proving to be essential, but the degree of it varies from country to country.

In some parts of the world, for instance, the culture seems to respond to, and even demand, examinations and grades.

An important point to bear in mind is that these study groups are not local deepening classes or local institutes, but elements of a system of distance-education administered by a national or regional institute. The concept of "local institutes" created some confusion at the beginning of the Four Year Plan, and the House of Justice offered the following clarification:

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"For the establishment of a training institute to be a viable and worthwhile enterprise, it would clearly have to serve an area with a reasonably large number of believers. Moreover, the development of effective curricula to raise up human resources to carry forward the process of entry by troops is not, in reality, a task that small local Baha'i communities can undertake. Generally speaking, the resources of a national community, or at least a sizeable region, need to be drawn upon in devising well-organized, formally conducted programmes. Although it is likely that as local communities grow, there will be those large enough to have their own independent institutes, at this point, such institutes run the danger, as you have surmised, of turning into deepening classes, which are, of course, of critical importance themselves and an activity every local community should carry out.

"This does not mean, however, that the courses of a national or regional institute would not be offered at the local level. In fact, a significant percentage of the national and regional institutes emerging around the world are organizing their programmes in such a way that many of their courses are conducted in local communities by believers trained as teachers or facilitators." +F16

As a study group advances through the sequence of courses, the capacity of each

member to serve the Faith increases, and various institutions and agencies step in and help the participants to put into practice what they have learned. The following passage from a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice commends one such effort:

"The plan of action you have devised for the coming months and the numerical goals you have set, closely correlated and well-measured, are clear evidence that you have gained valuable experience during this past year. If you continue unabated in your efforts, you will steadily increase the capacity within your national community to accompany large numbers of believers through a well-defined sequence of courses, helping them to acquire the needed capabilities of service. Since the first course in the sequence emphasizes spiritual identity and prayer, the House of Justice applauds your decision to increase, parallel to the formation of study circles, the number of local communities holding regular devotional meetings. Even in communities where the Local Spiritual Assembly is not functioning, it should be possible to establish such meetings through the initiative of those taking part in the study circles."+F17

Tutors

The third component of the system under consideration is the tutor (or facilitator). Such institutes begin their programmes by training several believers, already knowledgeable in the Faith, as tutors. This makes it possible for them to form study groups and establish their programmes on a firm foundation. Yet the expansion of the system depends on raising up an ever-growing number of tutors from among the participants themselves. Here again, the challenge is to strike the right balance. It is counter-productive to demand so high a quality of work from tutors that only a few are able to meet the standard, resulting in a system with inadequate coverage. On the other hand, an indiscriminate selection of tutors, in which everyone is asked to form a study group the moment he or she finishes one or two courses, also proves to be ineffective and leads to the collapse of the system:

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"Crucial to the success of the institute's endeavours will be the effectiveness of its tutors. They themselves will require training, both in how to facilitate the courses and maintain the cohesion of the groups studying in the towns and villages across the country. The institute will need to make concerted effort, therefore, to build its own capacity to supervise a growing number of tutors and train them, constantly improving the quality of their teaching."+F18

Coordination

The fourth component, namely, efficient coordination, is developed at two levels. At the national level, concern is for the efficacy of the courses, the fostering of enthusiasm for training in the country, and the compilation and dissemination of information regarding the institute, including the number of participants in the system and the record of their achievements. At the regional level, closer to the study groups themselves, the duties of the

coordinators include training tutors, following their progress in the villages and towns, ensuring the availability of materials, and organizing conferences and seminars for the exchange of experience. With respect to coordination at the national level, the House of Justice states:

"It is of the utmost importance, then, that you continue with unabated zeal and painstaking care to develop the capacity of your institutes to train growing contingents of believers. In this regard, you will need to ensure that your vision for the multiplication of human resources in that vast land is understood and shared by all those involved in this vital enterprise and that through various means, such as the regular dissemination of news of the accomplishments of your institutes, the friends' enthusiasm is heightened and maintained."+F19

Integrating the system

It should be noted at this point that such a system is not necessarily put into place at the outset in the way it is described here. In several countries, the initial strategy has been to deploy a band of institute teachers in a particular region, assigning to each a number of towns and villages. The first course of the institute programme is, then, conducted with a group of interested believers over a period of four or five consecutive days. Upon its completion, the teacher moves to another locality and repeats the course with a new group. When the number of those who have completed the first course is significant, the teachers go back again to help them study the second course. As the process advances, capable believers arise from the towns and villages themselves to act as tutors and form study groups of more permanence which meet regularly over an extended period.

These four components, methodically developed and properly integrated, create a system which has proven able to reach a large number of people at an affordable cost per student. The following statement from a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice provides a vision of the growth of such a system:

"The House of Justice was heartened to note that by the month of October 1997, over 900 believers in Tamil Nadu had gone through the first course of the national institute programme, and some 200

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had succeeded in completing the second one. It is assumed that a percentage of these will go on to study the third course, while the number entering the programme will continue to grow. This is indeed a most promising process of human resource development for a rapidly expanding community. For the development of human resources in India may be likened to the building of an ever-expanding pyramid, whose base must be constantly broadened. An increasing number of friends are recruited to enter the first basic course, and relatively significant percentages are then helped to reach higher and higher courses, acquiring thereby the needed capabilities of service."+F20

2.4 Social and economic development

It is worth mentioning that, in keeping with the directives of the House of Justice, the Office of Social and Economic Development is helping some institutes to add another dimension to their operations, namely, training in the area of development and even the administration of development projects. For the present, this assistance is limited to a few countries. It entails raising the institutional capacity of an institute to a new level, one at which it has a much greater degree of autonomy:

"Now that the foundations for the next stage of the institute's work have been laid, the House of Justice urges your Assembly to grant the institute the autonomy needed to function properly. The development of human resources for expansion and consolidation and for social and economic development, and the effective management of development-related projects, are not simple tasks, and the institute will require freedom of action to learn from its endeavours in order to consistently improve its work."+F21

The addition of this new dimension to the work of institutes is being carried out with great care. Since development-related activities often involve funds from non-Baha'i sources, a financial system has to be in place to meticulously track various lines of expenditure. Further, once an institute becomes engaged in development, it needs to interact with government agencies and organizations of civil society, often entering into collaborative relationships with them. All of this demands a degree of maturity that is achieved only through consistent effort and experience. In those places where the work is moving in this direction, the profile of an institution capable of pursuing a highly complex set of activities is beginning to emerge, and an exciting vision of a dynamic centre of learning is taking shape.

3. ADVANCING THE PROCESS OF ENTRY BY TROOPS

A pressing question at the mid-point of the Four Year Plan is what effect this impressive and rapid development of institutional capacity for the spiritual education of the friends will have on the process of entry by troops worldwide. Ultimately, the efficacy of an institute programme has to be measured by the growth of the community being served. But expectations should remain within reason while the potential of the institute is being systematically realized. If national communities set their sights too low and are content with offering a few courses to a limited number of believers year after year, the required dynamics of growth will not develop. Yet placing unreasonable demands on training institutes and those who participate in their

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programmes, especially at the early stage, would be counter-productive. What is needed is unrelenting resolve to steadily multiply human resources, combined with determination to take advantage of every opportunity for expansion.

3.1 Increasing human resources

Clearly measurable results will be achieved only as institutes succeed in training teachers of the Cause and active workers in large numbers. What

constitutes a significant increase in human resources, of course, will vary from country to country. In the largest Baha'i community, India, already more than 10,000 believers have studied the first course in the national institute programme. Although this is an extraordinary accomplishment, the institutions of the Faith in the country are well aware that to train even ten per cent of the total Baha'i population will require involving some 200,000 people. While not comparable to India in size, many national communities throughout the world have tens of thousands of Baha'is, of whom only a small fraction can at present be counted among the active promoters of the Faith. For each community to help a relatively significant number of believers progress through a sequence of courses represents an enormous challenge. The House of Justice makes the important point that meeting this challenge--and thus increasing the number of believers who have a strong Baha'i identity and a commitment to teaching the Cause--in itself constitutes an advance in the process of entry by troops:

"...if you are to realize your aspirations for the Cause in Guyana during the Four Year Plan, you will need to give further consideration, in consultation with the Counsellors, to what it means for your community to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. It is understandable that you may not wish to repeat the pattern whereby you achieved large-scale expansion in the past. Yet, whatever form entry by troops takes in your country in the future, it is clear that the development of your capacity to train a certain percentage of the believers for service to the Cause will be an inescapable imperative. Indeed, given that only a small fraction of the some 56,000 Baha'is in Guyana can be considered active supporters of the Faith, the very act of training a few thousand believers, and thus increasing the number who have a strong Baha'i identity and a commitment to teaching the Cause, would in itself constitute an advance in the process of entry by troops." +F22

3.2 Accelerating expansion

An extraordinary opportunity to multiply its human resources on a vast scale is now clearly within the grasp of the Baha'i community. Seizing it will call for added vigilance on the part of the institutions--the National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies, on the one hand, and the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the other--to ensure that the energies of the friends are channelled into some form of active service to the Faith:

"...as the friends steadily progress through a series of systematic courses, increasing their knowledge and skills, the responsibility will fall on your Assembly to see that their energies and talents are channelled in some form of active service to the Faith. This will have to be done in such a way that they are neither overburdened with responsibilities nor underchallenged, but are allowed to gradually

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gain confidence in their ability to serve and to make a distinctive contribution towards the achievement of the central aim of the Four Year Plan." +F23

The immediate result of this multiplication of human resources will undoubtedly be an increase in teaching activity undertaken at the initiative of the individual believer, initiative that needs to be nurtured by the institutions:

"For your community to grow at a pace commensurate with the receptivity of the people of Panama, your Assembly will need to pay close attention to certain fundamental areas of Baha'i activity throughout the country. One of the primary forces that propels growth is teaching undertaken by the friends on their own initiative. To properly flourish, however, personal teaching requires stimulation from the institutions; it must be fostered by National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, on the one hand, and the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the other. The friends everywhere need encouragement. Regular gatherings, at various levels, need to be held to maintain and heighten their enthusiasm for teaching. Opportunities have to be created for them to share stories of the successes they have achieved and the methods they have used, so that they can learn from one another. Literature and teaching materials must be made available to them in abundance. Without concerted efforts of this kind, it is difficult to increase continually the number of believers arising to discharge their sacred duty to teach." +F24

Local teaching projects constitute yet another channel into which the energies of the friends benefiting from institute programmes can be directed:

"Of equal importance to the promotion of personal teaching in Peru is the development of local communities, particularly the enhancement of their capacity to carry out teaching plans. Working in close collaboration with the Counsellors, you will need to consider how you can consistently increase the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies that can design and execute plans which utilize the diverse talents of the friends, thus multiplying their powers as they unite in collective action." +F25

Essential as local teaching projects are, however, it should be realized that, at this point in the history of the Faith, most believers reside in communities in which the Local Spiritual Assemblies are but nascent institutions.

Therefore, emphasis has now to be placed, in many countries, on implementing projects that concentrate on a small region, usually a cluster of villages with one or two towns. Even though most institutes have barely begun their work, in more than a few regions the effects of human resource development are already noticeable in the enthusiasm for service of groups who have been attending courses. Without doubt, the number of such regions will multiply rapidly in the months ahead, and it is crucial that teaching projects be promptly established in any region where the institute is exerting influence.

For a number of years, the International Teaching Centre has promoted projects of this kind under the designation "Long-Term Teaching Project". As a result, there is now ample experience in the Baha'i world which can be readily shared among national communities through the Counsellors. While such projects

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aim at bringing large numbers into the Faith at an accelerating pace, they are

not concerned merely with enrolments; nor is teaching carried out superficially. These projects involve a complex set of interrelated activities for expansion and consolidation which, together, result in a steady influx of new believers. Specifically, every effort is made to incorporate a significant percentage of the newly enrolled friends immediately into the institute programme, extending thereby the human resource base in the region.

The tasks before the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies are multiple and urgent. On the one hand, they will continue to strengthen the institutes and ensure that an increasing number of believers benefit from their programmes. On the other, they will support and encourage the friends in their individual teaching endeavours, assist Local Spiritual Assemblies in executing teaching plans, and establish long-term teaching projects in region after region. All the necessary elements are in place. The stage is set. There is every reason to believe that the combined effect of all these efforts will lead to the fulfilment of the major thrust of the Four Year Plan.

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F4. Ridvan 1996 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Baha'u'llah in Europe

F5. Ridvan 1996 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Baha'u'llah in Cambodia, Hong Kong, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam

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F8. Memorandum dated 3 April 1997 written by the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre

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- F25. Letter dated 11 January 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Peru