

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom

27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD

Tel: +44-20-7584-2566 E-mail: nsa@bahai.org.uk

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To all believers in the United Kingdom

Dearly loved friends,

As you continue to strive, against the backdrop of this evolving health crisis, to play your part in meeting the pressing spiritual and material needs of society, we wished to share with you some thoughts about the advancement of the work of the Plan at the present hour.

The unity of mankind is, as we know, the goal towards which the Bahá'í community is striving and all the efforts it has made, and is making, aim to reach this objective. Achieving unity on this scale calls for a transformation of society *'the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed'*¹, a transformation that *'shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions'*². The efforts of the Baha'í community to contribute to this process of transformation are guided by a framework at the heart of which is the Word of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that *'the power of implementation in this great endeavour is the penetrating influence of the Word of God and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit'*³. The past twenty-five years of ceaseless endeavour have enabled the Bahá'í community to create an instrument - one of *'limitless potentialities'*⁴ - that has the capacity to bring vast numbers of people in contact with the Creative Word. This instrument, the training institute, is presently equipping thousands of individuals with the capacity to make a meaningful contribution to the transformation of their local communities through engagement in study circles, junior-youth groups, children's classes and devotional meetings. Through this effort, we are seeing early glimmerings of a process that will in time lead to the emergence of a new race of men, a new world order.

In its 9 May 2020 message to all National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice provides essential guidance about the potency of this framework and its application in the challenging times we find ourselves in:

... Naturally, the activities undertaken must suit the prevailing conditions, but there should be no doubt that this is a time for noble aims, high resolve, and intense endeavour. As is well known, the activities of the Plan are intended to cultivate a thriving community spirit, through which resilience to mighty challenges is also strengthened. Educational efforts aim to raise up a growing number of souls who can contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of a community; devotional meetings nurture the spirit of service as it blossoms, rooting it in a culture of collective worship. In short, the promotion of the Plan implies building capacity to walk the path of service in every time and season—which must surely include moments of acute peril in the life of humanity, such as now.

Thus, whilst the pandemic has altered the context within which we work, the focus of our attention must remain, as it was before, on our local communities where friendships are built, intimate spiritual conversations take place, devotionals proliferate in every home, training to serve is undertaken, and a multiplication of activities organised by those resident in a community change the spiritual and material dimensions of life in villages and neighbourhoods.

In this same message the House of Justice has highlighted that in the current situation *‘while certain possibilities have been temporarily closed, others have opened up, and new means have emerged for strengthening existing patterns of activity’*, and they alert us to be vigilant *‘in ensuring that the primarily local character of community activities is not diluted’*. The National Spiritual Assembly has been delighted with the creative responses at the regional level that allowed inspirational teaching conferences and summer schools to take place online, all of which have sustained the community’s spirit during these difficult times and have strengthened existing local patterns of action. Some friends are learning to use social media as a means of reaching out in their local area, inviting those interested to online activities, which in some cases have safely moved offline. Although not without challenge, core activities, deepenings and firesides have been able to move online or continue within the family environment. Crucially they have maintained their local character, avoiding the enticement and diluting effect of including numbers of people from further afield, perhaps even from abroad. This has ensured that *‘community life, which the activities of the Five Year Plan are intended to promote, retains a recognisably local character and continues to thrive’*⁵.

The friends’ conscientious application of the coronavirus safety guidelines across the UK must, of course, continue. But, with regulations changing so frequently, all can constantly read their reality and, where appropriate, adapt accordingly, ever mindful of preserving the local character of activities. The National Assembly has been pleased to hear of examples where the friends have been making efforts to meet together again locally, while ensuring the safety and well-being of all. Examples of interactions held within the guidelines have included: communities hosting local Nineteen Day Feasts – sometimes outdoors, or sometimes in small pockets with those smaller groupings linking up with each other and others online; holding devotionals, study circles, junior youth groups and children’s classes, both indoors and out, within the limits of numeric constraints; outreach teaching projects where social distancing is respected; conversations with parents at the school gate; and newly arisen pioneers to goal clusters engaging in meaningful conversations with new neighbours.

Engagement at a local level has opened up many opportunities to contribute to the spiritual wellbeing of those around us, but also to their material and social needs, which grow day by day as the impact of the virus on individuals and families becomes more evident. Kindly deeds, social action projects of limited duration, and thoughtful interventions by Local Spiritual Assemblies that address the needs of individuals and families, are among the possibilities that make a profound difference to peoples’ lives. It is the National Assembly’s hope that we will see a multiplication in such actions that arise out of engagement in local community life through the activities of the Plan.

At each of its meetings, the National Spiritual Assembly prays for you, His army of light in this land, that you may dedicate yourselves to advancing the work of the Plan in the present conditions, that *‘this world will change into another world, and this darksome earth will be flooded with light...’*⁶.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,



Patrick O’Mara,
Secretary

¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, LXX

² Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*

³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, second Tablet to the Hague

⁴ Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010

⁵ Universal House of Justice, To an individual, 28 July 2020

⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, first Tablet to the Hague