

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

National Conference 2000

Friday 10th - Sunday 12th November Scarborough Spa Complex

ENDS AND BEGINNINGS

committed to growth, prepared to learn

The National Spiritual Assembly warmly invites you to a conference not to be missed!

Guest Speakers: Counsellor Patrick O'Mara and Counsellor Sohrab Youssefian

Last year we began by building our future as a community, making our mark and strengthening our Covenant with God. This year will not only be a celebration of our past achievements, but much more!

Ends and Beginnings is a conference designed to be interactive, in a different style to previous experiences, appealing to all, whilst placing greater emphasis on our precious children and youth. What will make this conference special?

Considering the inevitable growth in these Islands in the years to come, there are pressing challenges to face. This conference will address those challenges through inspiring and informative presentations from the Counsellors, National Spiritual Assembly, and friends around the country.

More details will be in Bahá'í Journal UK, October issue.

Scarborough Tourist Information - Tel: 01723 373333

For enquiries please contact: National Conference Committee Tel: 020 7584 2566 Fax: 020 7584 9402 e-mail: <mailto:angela.tidswell@bahai.org.uk>

Rural boundary changes - what's happening?

Many of us know by now that in the more rural areas of the United Kingdom, the Bahá'í "map" is being re-drawn so that each Local Spiritual Assembly will cover a more truly "local" area.

Is it a good idea?

The UK Bahá'í community have received guidelines from the the Universal House of Justice, which "God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error". (1) In other words, we know that this change has the blessing of Almighty God, and that the changes will benefit us. We can be quite sure it's a good idea!

Why change?

The Universal House of Justice has determined that the time is ripe for us to follow more closely the instruction of Bahá'u'lláh, as explained in a letter to our National Assembly: "...the Bahá'í principle is that a Local Spiritual Assembly should be established in every town and city." (2) At present in the more rural areas of the UK, Local Assemblies often cover several distinct large towns, whereas they really ought to be "based on what are commonly conceived by the general public to be separate town or village communities". (3)

What if there are very few Bahá'ís in the area?

We have been told that this change "should not be based on mere convenience in relation to the Bahá'í population. It should be based on objective factors of clear geographical boundaries and generally accepted towns of the civil population". We are planning for the future - "Thus, they (boundaries) should not have to be changed as the Bahá'í population grows." (4)

Won't we miss each other when we become separate communities?

Only if we don't get together! The concept of "Area Growth Programmes" was mentioned in the Ridván message. This involves communities consulting together, praying together, serving together. There are no boundaries to activities such as devotional gatherings, deepenings, service projects, meetings for fellowship, and firesides. We'll be able to become travel-teachers by just going to the next town!

Who benefits?

Well, the Bahá'í Faith is for everyone, so ultimately every soul benefits. Those who enter the Faith in rural parts will belong to a more natural local community, where they can more easily weave bonds of fellowship and come together for worship and service.

Those who long to teach the Faith will benefit from a more local focus for their efforts - after all, we know from experience that smaller, local projects have better success in attracting souls.

Furthermore, any Bahá'í who fully supports the decisions of the House of Justice and the National Assembly will benefit spiritually because this is a sign of firmness in the Covenant, and has its own blessings. "Be ye assured with the greatest assurance that, verily, God will help those who are firm in His Covenant in every matter." (5)

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Will and Testament, p14
2. Letter from the House of Justice to the NSA-UK, 15th Sept '96
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Power of Divine Assistance, p210

Child Protection Guidelines

The National Spiritual Assembly has revised and expanded its guidelines for the protection of children and young people which must be followed for residential events, Bahá'í community schools, etc.

Copies are available on request from the National Spiritual Assembly, at 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD.

It is extremely important that organisers of Bahá'í events which include children's classes make themselves familiar with these guidelines and ensure they are followed.

New compilation available electronically

The new compilation from the Universal House of Justice, "The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting", is available electronically in the following ways:

It has been published on the National Spiritual Assembly's Website and can be visited at:
<http://www.bahai.org.uk/writings>

A formatted e-copy (PDF file - requires Adobe Acrobat Reader) is available from the National Assembly. Please send an e-mail to: <mailto:resources@bahai.org.uk>

Administrative rights

With deep regret the National Spiritual Assembly announces that the following individuals have had their

administrative rights removed.

Mr Mehendran Chelvachanaran of Stevenage: for active involvement in politics.

Mr Martin Jones of Carmarthenshire: for active involvement in politics.

Office of the Treasurer Bridge House, 97-101 High Street, Tonbridge TN9 1DP Tel: 01732 369745 e-mail: <mailto:treasury@bahai.org.uk>

The situation of the National Fund

One of the basic concepts underlying the practice of giving to the Bahá'í Fund is that every believer is left entirely free to determine the amount of his or her contribution. Furthermore, a distinctive feature of this obligation is that a single coin contributed by a believer of little means is as precious as a large sum contributed by a wealthy believer. Thus, although amounts are not prescribed, a measure does exist, namely, the spirit of sacrifice and love with which an offering is made. No one, of course, has the right to judge the degree of sacrifice of another. But each of us must reflect in our own heart on the mystery of sacrifice when determining the level of our contributions. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth." (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p76)

The importance of universal participation

Over the past few years, the proportion of believers contributing regularly (defined by the National Spiritual Assembly as once per calendar month) to the National Fund remained under 1%. Further, only 50% of Local Spiritual Assemblies regularly supported the National Fund. This continued to be the case in the first third of this financial year and remains a source of deep concern to the National Assembly. The value of universal participation cannot be overestimated: in terms of the target set for donations to the National Fund during this financial year, the National Assembly notes that it would require the following level of contributions to achieve this ambitious but vital goal:

* £8 per adult per month * £70 per Local Spiritual Assembly per month * £7 per Group per month

The National Spiritual remains confident that these goals are well within the reach of the friends in the United Kingdom.

Tax-efficient giving to the Fund now even easier

The National Spiritual Assembly wholeheartedly welcomes the Gift Aid scheme which came into effect on 6th April 2000. Local Assembly Treasurers have been urged to promote this new method of tax-efficient giving to the Fund which is designed to replace the practice of covenanting donations by income tax paying believers. There are number of advantages to the new Gift Aid scheme including:

the abolition of the minimum limit of £250 as Gift Aid donations (this means that donations of as little as £5 from tax payers can now be treated as Gift Aid contributions) the need to fill in only one form to cover all future donations under the scheme

Next month - Issues to do with the Gift Aid scheme.

The Office of the Treasurer

Mr Farzin Yourtchi now serves as Financial Manager and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Office and management of the financial affairs of the Faith under the supervision of the Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly, Dr Kishan Manocha. The staff at the Office of the Treasurer are always willing to answer queries with regard to any aspect of the National Fund or the Funds of the Faith in general. Requests for a visit from the Spirit and Form team should also be addressed to the Office.

Bahá'í Information Office Third Floor, Bridge House, 97-101 High Street, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1DP Tel: 01732

World Citizenship paper

"A Vision of World Citizenship is Essential for the Effectiveness of Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection - A Wake-up Call for the World's Travel and Tourism Industry"

This paper, by Peter McAlpine of Mahidol University, Thailand, is written from a Bahá'í standpoint even though the Faith is not mentioned, and is an interesting and useful item for those involved in Agenda 21 activities, promotion of world citizenship, etc. To obtain a copy (hard copy) contact the Bahá'í Information Office. SAE appreciated as always.

National Convention report available

The full report for National Convention 157 BE including the Convention resolutions and National Spiritual Assembly responses, is now available in the following ways:

On the National Assembly's Website at: <http://www.bahai.org.uk/admin/natconv157> In hard copy from the National Office:

27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD Tel: 020 7584 2566, Fax: 020 7584 9402 or e-mail: <mailto:resources@bahai.org.uk> with your postal address In electronic form as a PDF file (requires Adobe Acrobat Reader) by e-mail: <mailto:resources@bahai.org.uk>

Local Assembly responsibility - registration records

Local Spiritual Assemblies are reminded that they should be maintaining a local register of births, marriages, divorces and deaths. The register should be something permanent, such as a book or notebook. Groups might also wish to begin this practice.

Such a register should record

for births: * the full name of the child born * the full names of the parents * the date of birth * the place of birth

for marriages: * the full name of the bride * the full names of her parents * the full name of the groom * the full names of his parents * the full names of the witnesses * the date of the wedding * the place of the wedding

for divorces: * the full name of the wife * the full name of the husband * the date of the marriage * the date of commencement of year of patience * the date of the divorce

for deaths: * the full name of the deceased * the date of death * the place of death * the date of the funeral * the place the deceased is buried

These details should also be passed to the Records Office of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Such records are not only important in themselves, they will also provide a useful resource for future historians.

BIO urges local communities - "please send us your press cuttings!"

Going on Pilgrimage?

Even if not soon, please bear this in mind for when you are

Whether it is a full pilgrimage or a three-day visit you will want to share the experience with the people in your area. A press lead (suggested press release) is available to help you prepare a report for your local media the "pilgrimage with a difference" story is often of great interest to a readership who associate the Holy Land with

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth.

To obtain a copy please contact the National Spiritual Assembly at 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD.

National Assembly Secretary to chair influential interfaith body

The National Spiritual Assembly is happy to share the news that its Secretary, Mr Barney Leith, has been chosen as Chair of the United Kingdom and Ireland chapter of the World Conference on Religions and Peace. This development with an influential interfaith body is a further indication of the status of the Bahá'í Faith in these circles.

Some notes on Bahá'í proofs based on the Qur'an

Islam is growing in this country and throughout the West. In the UK it is now the second-largest religious community, and one reason for its growth is its missionary outreach into the wider community. Bahá'ís are therefore increasingly likely to have to interface with Muslims and they should know something about Islam and the Qur'an. After all, this holy book foretells the coming of our own religion.

"They must ... approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'an which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Babí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God." (Shoghi Effendi - "The Advent of Divine Justice", p49)

Of course there is a need for wisdom in teaching Muslims and the Friends should bear this in mind. If you have any doubts you should refer to your local Assembly's "Notes for Guidance" or contact the National Spiritual Assembly.

The National Assembly is happy to make available "Some notes on Bahá'í proofs based on the Qur'an" as an aid both to increasing our own knowledge and to wise teaching. It was prepared for use in Africa some years ago and has proved its usefulness in many places and on many occasions.

Because of its format this document is only available in hard copy. It can be obtained on request from the Bahá'í Information Office, at the address above.