

Bahá'í Council of Ontario Conseil Bahá'í de l'Ontario

22 July 2021

To all the friends serving the Cause in Ontario

Dear friends,

In recent weeks, a fresh sense of joy, optimism, and inspiration has enveloped our province. Day by day the conditions of a global pandemic in Ontario are lessening. The number of those afflicted by illness has rapidly dwindled, as has the risk of further rapid spread, thereby allowing our government to begin [lifting many of the restrictions](#) that were put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19. The many peoples of Ontario, who have patiently endured a long period of social isolation, are now increasingly visiting each other and refreshing the bonds of friendship. An ardent hope that the end of the pandemic is now in sight has created unique possibilities for an unparalleled surge in the growth of our community.

Everyone in Ontario who desires to build a better world - whether neighbourhood teams, groups of families working together, hosts of devotional gatherings, children's class teachers, animators of junior youth groups, tutors assisting adults or youth to progress through institute courses, participants in core activities and their family members, institute coordinators, members of Area Teaching Committees and Local Spiritual Assemblies - are aflame with inspiration from the letters sent by the Universal House of Justice on the occasions of the [Day of the Covenant](#) and [Ridván](#), and are energized by the [call to all friends](#) from our beloved National Spiritual Assembly. Many of these friends, whether formally enrolled in the Bahá'í community or not, have been steadfastly preparing themselves to accomplish the aims of the One Year Plan.

The work before us is clear. As we survey the region, we can see two broad and closely related contexts in which the growth of our community is being pursued. The first is where friends are learning to work in small areas - often a neighbourhood in a large city, or the entirety of a town or village in less densely populated clusters - and are striving to engage entire families in a vibrant pattern of community life centered around prayer, service, and study of institute materials. These small centres naturally fall along a spectrum. In some, the work is at an early

stage where the friends, often several families working together, “learn how to explain the purpose of those activities, how to demonstrate through deeds the purity of their motives, how to nurture environments where the hesitant can be reassured, how to help the inhabitants see the rich possibilities created by working together, and how to encourage them to arise to serve the best interests of their society”(1). In yet other places, teams who have often been labouring for years are learning to foster the intense and sustained participation of many hundreds and thousands, gaining insights into the dynamics of engaging large numbers and learning to open activities to “whole groups at once—bands of friends and neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society around them can be refashioned.”(2) In many of these centres of activity, the friends are learning to recognize conditions of particular receptivity among specific populations — for example, among youth, mothers, and among certain ethnic populations — and are learning to untap this potential while ensuring they converse with all that cross their path and invite everyone to participate in activities. It is in these small places that we are beginning to see the first glimmerings of the society-building powers of the Faith. One aim of the One Year Plan in Ontario is, therefore, to foster additional such centres while assisting every existing centre to reach larger numbers.

The second context in which the work is advancing is among the thousands of friends in Ontario who are learning to initiate activities and invite their friends, neighbours, families, and coworkers to participate. You will remember well the galvanizing call of the National Spiritual Assembly in [July 2020](#) for a regular devotional gathering to be established in every household associated with the Greatest Name in Canada. The response to this call has been astonishing. At Rıdván 2020, there were some 1,121 devotional gatherings in Ontario engaging some 4,400 participants in regular prayer; there now are over 2,300 gatherings engaging 7,000. We have seen how this simple act of service — of learning to pray regularly with others — has released incredible capacity among thousands. Area Teaching Committees and Local Spiritual Assemblies have been learning to assist every family and friend to hold such gatherings in many contexts. Devotional gatherings can take many forms and are often very simple at the outset, as simple as a single family learning to pray regularly together or the participants in a children’s class praying before each class with their parents. Over time hosts of devotional gatherings gain many capacities and this work naturally becomes more complex: as hosts learn to invite all those around them to participate and share prayers with them, to imbue gatherings with profound conversations, to describe and arrange core activities and invite families to participate, and even to assist participants to initiate their own devotional gatherings. We have seen how families

living close together are working in groups to support each other in this work, and in this way begin to initiate a pattern of community life in yet more neighbourhoods and villages. To every friend who serves in this way or who wishes to begin doing so — those who are planting the “seeds of future Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs”⁽³⁾, who are learning about the devotional life of a community, and who are fanning the flame of service and worship — the National Assembly issued the following call:

Might each family that has not yet established a regular space for prayers in their home, now do so? Might each household with one such weekly or monthly gathering, consider assisting someone in their circle to begin one with a few friends? Might each group gathering for prayers initiate a Book 1 study circle and welcome others to the direct study and application of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh? Might each one in a devotional gathering or study circle, inspired by a vision of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s kindness to the young ones, turn a loving gaze to the children and youth in the participating families and learn how to engage them?⁽⁴⁾

We are increasingly seeing that efforts within “networks” and the work in “neighbourhoods”, far from being separate and distinct contexts, are closely related. Both are essential. After all, do each of us not live in a neighbourhood or village; and who among us does not have coworkers, family members, or friends? Has the Blessed Beauty not charged each of us to be “unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break”?⁽⁵⁾ Each friend - whatever the circumstances of our current efforts - must consider how to strengthen our service in both contexts.

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Beloved friends, the possibilities before us are clear: Ontario has the potential to almost double the number of core activities and participation in them, reaching at least 5,000 core activities by Ridván 2022 that involve the participation of some 20,000. Yet, accomplishing this goal will require an unprecedented wave of sacrifice, focus, intensity, and, above all, dedicated time.

The Bahá’í Council therefore calls every friend in Ontario to dedicate a period of service to the Cause, so that our region can release the required intensity needed to win the aims of the Plan. All are included in this call. Entire families. Young or old. Children, youth, adults, and our elders. Those with deep experience and those who are taking their first steps in service. Those who have studied the institute materials and those who have not yet done so. Those who are formally enrolled and those who are not. All are welcome. All are needed. The only requirement

is a willingness to serve and to sacrifice a period of dedicated time in the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This regional program, which will be coordinated by the Council, will allow the friends to pledge themselves to one of several possible dedicated time commitments, such as:

- Full-time service until the conclusion of the One Year Plan at Ridván 2022
- Full-time service during the summer months
- Dedicating every weekend and many weekday evenings until the conclusion of the One Year Plan at Ridván 2022
- 9 full days per three month cycle

Two information sessions have been arranged for those who nurture a desire to participate or for those who would like to hear additional information and have questions. These sessions will be held on Wednesday, July 28 and Tuesday, August 3, from 8-10pm. We ask that friends register using the [registration form \(https://forms.gle/hH18C2FE8H4dwLe4A\)](https://forms.gle/hH18C2FE8H4dwLe4A). You may also contact the program coordinator via email at period.of.service@ontariobahai.org.

This program is primarily for those who can sacrifice a significant portion of time, at minimum nine full days per three month cycle. Yet every effort and contribution, however small, is welcome, encouraged, and essential. There are many opportunities for those who cannot dedicate this amount of time to participate in the plans arranged by their cluster agencies.

What brings us untold joy is that many friends have already been spontaneously dedicating this year to full time service in the name of the Master. We have heard many such accounts, three of which have been recently published on OntarioBahai.org, which we hope will serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement to you: [A team of Four Arises to Serve Full Time in Sudbury](#), ["I can give this year to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!" Dedicated Service in Thunder Bay](#), and [The Camel Stopped Where It Was Meant To: A World Traveller Pioneers to Brockville](#).

As you prayerfully contemplate dedicating a period of service, may the following exhortations of the beloved Master guide your hearts and souls:

O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and, raising the call of “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá” in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the divine teachings! This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore it! Please God, ye may achieve it. (6)

Look at me, follow me, be as I am; take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise or blame; for all these things ye must care not at all. Look at me and be as I am; ye must die to

yourselves and to the world, so ye shall be born again and enter the kingdom of heaven. Behold the candle, how it gives light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light. (7)

Whensoever holy souls, drawing on the powers of heaven, shall arise with such qualities of the spirit, and march in unison, rank on rank, every one of those souls will be even as one thousand, and the surging waves of that mighty ocean will be even as the battalions of the Concourse on high. What a blessing that will be—when all shall come together, even as once separate torrents, rivers and streams, running brooks and single drops, when collected together in one place will form a mighty sea.(8)

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

THE BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

Alex Arjomand, Secretary