

communiqué

Sultán172 BE/January 2016



All in a spirit of joy: 2015 follow up youth conference in Derry

In August of 2015, around 40 youth gathered for a weekend in St Columb's Park House, Derry. This gathering was a follow up youth conference to the 114 youth conferences that were held globally in 2013 and its purpose was to explore themes such as the role of youth in today's society, what purpose shapes individual and collective action and how to develop the capacity for true friendship; all in a spirit of joy!

We studied these themes firstly as a large group reading text from materials prepared by the Universal House of Justice. As we studied, we watched videos which crystallised in our minds the key concepts from each workshop. We then studied these themes in smaller groups of around 10 or 12 youth, lovingly facilitated by Tara Fadaei, Maria Ward and Sophia Sharma. In each small group, we considered questions relating to the workshop we studied as a larger group. The questions were answered both through in-depth discussion and the use of the arts.



The highlight of the conference was when the groups came together for a plenary session of sharing drama, dance, music and some art; all of which emerged from the small group activities. We were lucky to have most of the Derry Bahá'í community join us at different stages throughout the weekend and on the Saturday evening, Arjang Agahi presented the story of Badí'. The youth were so touched by this account of a youth giving his life to the Cause.

The atmosphere at the conference was one of so much love which strengthened the ties of friendship between the youth. These friendships will prove to be significant in supporting one another on our individual and collective paths of service.

– Rhianna Giffin

From the Universal House of Justice

The Plan upon which the Bahá'í world embarked nearly five years ago is in its closing stages; the final tally of its accomplishments grows still, but will soon be sealed. The collective effort it inspired has called for wholehearted reliance on those powers with which a benevolent Lord has endowed His loved ones. Gathered with you at this moment of reflection, we are conscious of a determination among the friends to bring the current Plan to a fitting conclusion, and of an eagerness to advance further along the path that experience has marked out.

29 December 2015

Personal reflections

I learned that there are a lot of needs in this society we are living in and to be able to eliminate these needs, we have to understand our role in our community. There is more to life than just our personal needs and aspirations. We are here to serve, support, love and empower our neighbours to contribute to the betterness of this world. – Hazel

During a workshop on early adolescence, we had many in depth conversations about the importance of the generation after us, and how it is at this time that opinions begin to form and responsibilities grow. As a group we identified destructive forces within society and created a display to prove that these forces are everywhere and have a massive effect. The dynamics of the group throughout the weekend most definitely made it an experience to remember, with many things learned. – Natasha



“Blessed Days” Twin Holy Day Celebrations

We celebrated the Birth of the Báb at the home of one of the believers. A gift from the NSA arrived that morning, the “Blessed Days” booklet, containing three newly available tablets of Bahá’u’lláh in Arabic and English. The atmosphere was charged with excitement, and some of the Báb’s writings were read along with stories of His life. This was of course followed by food and refreshment.

The next evening, the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh was celebrated in Morton Community Centre, which is also the venue for several of Belfast’s JY and children’s classes. The 40-strong crowd was made up from the Bahá’í community and friends from the local community. The room was

beautifully and carefully arranged, the lights were dimmed, candles were lit, and roses adorned the room. During the devotional it was beautiful to see how the children had grown to show reverence, respect and love when saying prayers. Several activities followed: decorating birthday cards for Bahá’u’lláh, contributing to a fresco of the Earth adorned with a quote from the Supreme Pen, and two dramatic presentations; first an audience with Queen Victoria when she received Bahá’u’lláh’s message, then Professor E. Brown describing his meeting with the Blessed Beauty. Finally the event concluded with joyous sharing of food and meaningful conversations! – Sam Beaulieu

Meditations

“... If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid.”

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 81)

THE BAHÁ’Í CALENDAR

Since ancient times, probably starting during the Bronze Age, every civilization on the planet has had a calendar. At present there are several in use in the world, among them; western (gregorian), Islamic, Chinese, Hindu and Buddhist. They fall into three categories; solar, lunar, and lunisolar. It is no surprise that the new Divine Civilization should have its own calendar, devised by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.

In The Bahá’í Calendar, the day begins and ends at sunset. The week has seven days, the month nineteen days, and there are nineteen months in the year, with four or five intercalary days, and nine Holy Days. In addition, the Báb divided the years into cycles of nineteen (Vahid), each of which has a name. We are now in the last year of the ninth cycle.

Since the early days of the Faith, the birthdays of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh have been celebrated in the east according to the lunar Muslim calendar, and in the west the solar Gregorian calendar. Bahá’í texts state that it will be up to the Universal House of Justice to resolve the disparity. On the 10th of July 2014 they informed the Bahá’í world that the time had come to adopt a unified calendar.

“The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation is a symbol of the power of Divine Revelation to reshape human perception of material, social and spiritual reality. Through it, sacred moments are distinguished, humanity’s place in space and time re-imagined, and the rhythm of life recast”

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas explains that the celebration of the birthdays of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh should take place on two consecutive days, and “are accounted as one in the sight of God”. Until now they have been celebrated in the west on 20th October and 12th November, but in the Muslim lunar calendar they fall on the first and second days of the month of Muharrám. These dates will now be used by the whole world, and according to the solar calendar they will move. As of Naw-Rúz 2015, the Bahá’í Meridian is the city of Tehran, and the spring equinox there determines the start of the Bahá’í year and the dates of the Twin Holy Days, which will always fall in October or November (the dates have been calculated up to 2065). The other Holy Day dates remain the same, but may vary by a day, depending on the exact date of the new year.

Now, as we approach the two-hundredth anniversaries of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb in 2017 and 2019, we will do so as a united global community. – Susie Agahi



Unity in our Midst Northern Lights Winter School

The Northern Lights winter school took place from 27–30 December at Lorne House. Here's what some of the attendees had to say!



Qudrat: It's an absolute pleasure to be here, and to be with friends, and those who are friends of friends. You catch up with people you haven't seen in a while. It's great, everybody wants to help – to serve together to make it work.

Patrick: It's an opportunity to meet those Bahá'ís you don't normally see. And it's a learning experience too, there's a lot of information, interaction... A way for understanding more about the Bahá'í Faith.



Caroline: I feel the school gives everyone a purpose; there's something for everyone, and you meet new people each time. I find out more about the Faith from people – it's informal and I can ask questions without feeling silly. The venue is great as well, we're so close to the beach and there are lots of opportunities to go for a walk.



Sana: It's not that often you see so many Bahá'ís in one place, just seeing all the positive interactions. For me, that's worth paying £60 for.

Walking the path of service: Our year of service volunteers

You may remember that in 2014/15 Belfast LSA hosted a Year of Service volunteer, to consolidate the work being done in the local community. It was a great success and in 2015/16 the LSA is hosting two volunteers: Lian Foroudi from England, and Thomas Lee from Belfast. I managed to track them down (they are very busy!) and ask them a few questions:

What's a normal day like on your Year of Service (YoS)?

Lian: Different every day. Sometimes it depends on the work rota (*both Tom and Lian have part-time jobs*). I generally study the Writings in the morning, and we have home visits in the afternoons for the families of the children taking part in the activities.

Tom: Some evenings I'm at the children's class, other evenings the junior youth group, and devotionals. Our days are busy! Although it's good to be busy.

What's the most difficult/hardest part of being on YoS?

T: Time management. If I have nothing planned, how can I make good use of the time? I've gotten much better at it. I use a whiteboard now to organize my week and it's surprising how much more I get done when I plan it.

L: A lot of the things were new to me: new studies, the children's classes, visiting the parents. It wasn't something I had done much in my own community at home. For example, the expansion phase, going on outreach. That was a challenge for the first couple of days. At the moment everything's good, but I'm sure some new challenges will arise now!

And what are the highlights?

L: Coming into this new community, and really... becoming a part of it. Being immersed in the community life. That has been really good. And I really like the children's classes!

T: Along similar lines, delving deeper into the community life – as the year of service has progressed I've gotten deeper into the community, and the Faith as well (*Tom has been Bahá'í for around a year now*). It's really helped to immerse myself and learn about the Writings, how the institutions work, and being around the Bahá'ís. The work we've been doing on the YoS is appreciated by people. Even those outside the Faith see what we're doing and it gets a positive reaction. Maybe the highlight for me is knowing that I'm working hard to change my community and make the world better.

What would you tell your former self?

L: Wholeheartedly go for it, join in with all endeavours, immerse yourself as much as you can. An event which maybe isn't connected directly to the core activities is still an opportunity to interact and meet people from the community.

T: Remember you can ask for help with things you're going through, there's a support network, and we have the LSA as well. Also immerse yourself as much as you can, like going to unit convention – I didn't strictly have to be there because I can't vote (*Tom is under 21*), but I learned a lot about the election process from watching, and participating as one of the tellers.

Thanks guys, keep up the good work!

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Winter School continued

Edwin: I think it's been one of the best cluster schools we've had. One of the things I want to say is, we underestimate the role the local Bahá'í community of North Down plays in the school. It would be incredibly difficult to do it if they didn't play the role that they play. I think a lot of people don't see that.

There have been a lot of young people at the school this time, including a lot of babies and toddlers, which has been lovely to see.



Jixian: I'm cutting carrots for the lunch later. It's very nice working in the kitchen. We discuss a lot while we work, it's very social!



Sam: People coming together to study, to try different courses – it's a good idea. The mixture of courses, workshops, activities, helping out in the kitchen. Camaraderie and serving at the same time. It's laid back and people feel welcome.



Gemma: There is a very accommodating atmosphere for the needs of small people – so that's good, and also the fact that we have a space set up for parents and grandparents to take care of them. And to play and relax and feed. There's a very family friendly feel about the place.

Our humble start: Community building in East Belfast

I became a Bahá'í in May of last year, and my daughter Erin in July; together we decided to reach out to our community in East Belfast. After Summer School, I spent every day praying and meditating in preparation for our activities in the area, asking God to lead us to those who were ready for His Cause.

We started with a meditation, prayer and reflection group on Saturday nights. Meditation is a very important part of our relationship with our Creator. Although it must be practiced daily with diligence and patience on our own, it was important to begin in a group to help find the correct methods, and to understand the journey within.

“Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate.”

– ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks

Our second activity was a children's classes. I felt the need for outreach within the area, so I came home one day and went out in to my street and the next one. Within an hour I had 13 children, which showed people's openness and need for a community. I was very open about the Bahá'í Faith. We began our class in September. Erin and I facilitate the class in our



home (we completed Book 3 over the summer) and it continues with a core of 7 children attending regularly.

A community devotional followed naturally. Parents attended, along with several Chinese students and other members of the Bahá'í community. It's an inter-faith devotional and has been very successful. The word of God itself, when allowed to be expressed freely, is recognised through all the Manifestations' Writings and its similarity running through all religions. This is a great foundation to build on, and it can dissolve barriers. From this devotional has sprung a Book 1 to be started in the new year.

– Donna Semple

Announcements

The Northern Lights Bahá'í Spring School will be held on
25–28 March, 2016 at Lorne House.

Contacts and Information

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Please note, views expressed by various contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland or the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.