

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

13 July 1964

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

TEACHING THE MASSES

When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins. Witness the emergence of Christianity and of Islam. These masses are the rank and file, steeped in traditions of their own, but receptive to the new Word of God, by which, when they truly respond to it, they become so influenced as to transform those who come in contact with them.

God's standards are different from those of men. According to men's standards, the acceptance of any cause by people of distinction, of recognized fame and status, determines the value and greatness of that cause. But, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "The summons and the message which We gave were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only. Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it." Or again, "He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. How could He, otherwise, have fulfilled His testimony unto men, if ye be of them that ponder His Cause in their hearts." In countries where teaching the masses has succeeded, the Bahá'ís have poured out their time and effort in village areas to the same extent as they had formerly done in cities and towns. The results indicate how unwise it is to solely concentrate on one section of the population. Each National Assembly therefore should so balance its resources and harmonize its efforts that the Faith of God is taught not only to those who are readily accessible but to all sections of society, however remote they may be.

The unsophisticated people of the world—and they form the large majority of its population—have the same right to know of the Cause of God as others. When the friends are teaching the Word of God they should be careful to give the Message in the same simplicity as it is enunciated in our Teachings. In their contacts they must show genuine and divine love. The heart of an unlettered soul is extremely sensitive; any trace of prejudice on the part of the pioneer or teacher is immediately sensed.

When teaching among the masses, the friends should be careful not to emphasize the charitable and humanitarian aspects of the Faith as a means to win recruits. Experience has shown that when facilities such as schools, dispensaries, hospitals, or even clothes and food are offered to the people being taught, many complications arise. The prime motive should always be the response of man to God's message, and the recognition of His Messenger. Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the Teachings; and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

After declaration, the new believers must not be left to their own devices. Through correspondence and dispatch of visitors, through conferences and training courses, these friends must be patiently strengthened and lovingly helped to develop into full Bahá'í maturity. The beloved Guardian referring to the duties of Bahá'í Assemblies in assisting the newly declared believer has written: "... the members of each and every Assembly should endeavor, by their patience, their love, their tact and wisdom, to nurse, subsequent to his admission, the newcomer

into Bahá'í maturity, and win him over gradually to the unreserved acceptance of whatever has been ordained in the teachings."

Expansion and consolidation are twin processes that must go hand in hand. The friends must not stop expansion in the name of consolidation. Deepening the newly enrolled believers generates tremendous stimulus which results in further expansion. The enrollment of new believers, on the other hand, creates a new spirit in the community and provides additional potential manpower that will reinforce the consolidation work.

We would like to share with you some of the methods used by National Assemblies in various continents that have proved useful in teaching the masses, and attach a list. Certain of these may be valuable in your area, in addition to any methods you may yourself devise.

We are fervently praying that all National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, supported by the individual believers, will achieve outstanding success in the fulfillment of this glorious objective.

Please share this communication with all the friends.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

Teaching the Masses

Annex

1. Materials are sent at once to the new believers. In some places this material is in the form of printed cards, mainly in color, portraying a Bahá'í theme or principle. This helps the new believer to know that his declaration has been accepted and to feel that he now belongs to the new Faith.
2. Training courses of about 2 weeks duration are held. To facilitate attendance and reduce cost, a number of villages are grouped together as one zone in which the course is held. The students to the courses are usually selected, so that the more capable participate, and teaching is facilitated. Transportation expenses, feeding and accommodation are provided, if it is found that the participants are unable to cover such expenses themselves. The material to be taught is prepared ahead of time, presented in simple language, and translated into the vernacular. After the course, the more promising students are picked out, and with their consent, are requested to undertake teaching projects for a limited period. It is sometimes found that long-term projects are also useful. These projects generally are carefully planned as to their duration, places to be visited, and material to be taught. If the traveling teachers are not able to cover their expenses, traveling and living expenses are provided by the Fund for the execution of a given and temporary teaching project.
3. Shorter training courses in the form of conferences over a long weekend are held.
4. These activities—training courses and conferences—are repeated as frequently as possible and are not dependent upon the acquisition of Teaching Institutes. In the absence of such Institutes, these courses and conferences are normally held in Bahá'í homes or hired quarters, such as schools, etc. In order to facilitate the physical catering and accommodation of the participants they are sometimes asked to come to the course with their eating utensils and bedding.
5. In the visits made to the villages, the visiting teacher meets with the Local Communities to give them basic Bahá'í knowledge, such as living the Bahá'í life, the importance of teaching, prayer, fasting, Nineteen Day Feasts, Bahá'í elections, and contributions to the

Fund. The question of contributions to the Fund is of utmost importance, so that the new believers may quickly feel themselves to be responsible members of the Community. Each National Assembly must find ways and means to stimulate the offering of contributions, in cash or kind, to make it easy for the friends to contribute and to give proper receipts to the donors.

These are but suggestions based on experience which may help you in your efforts to teach and deepen the spiritually starved multitudes in your area.

In the course of carrying out such a tremendous spiritual campaign among the masses, disappointments will well be encountered. We tabulate a few instances that have been brought to our notice:

- a. Visiting pioneers or teachers may find in some places newly enrolled believers not so enthusiastic about their religion as expected, or not adjusting to standards of Bahá'í life, or they may find them thinking of material benefits they may hope to derive from their new membership. We should always remember that the process of nursing the believer into full spiritual maturity is slow, and needs loving education and patience.
- b. Some teaching committees, in their eagerness to obtain results, place undue emphasis on obtaining a great number of declarations to the detriment of the quality of teaching.
- c. Some traveling teachers, in their desire to show the result of their services, may not scrupulously teach their contacts, and in some rare cases, if, God forbid, they are insincere, may even give false reports.

Such irregularities have happened and can be repeated, but must not be a source of discouragement. By sending a team of teachers to an area, or by sending at intervals other teachers to those areas, and through correspondence and reports, such situations can be detected and immediately adjusted. The administration of the Faith must at all times keep in close touch with the teaching work.

To sum up:

1. Teaching the waiting masses is a reality facing each National Assembly.
2. The friends must teach with conviction, determination, genuine love, lack of prejudice, and in a simple language addressed to the heart.
3. Teaching must be followed up by training courses, conferences, and regular visits to deepen the believers in their knowledge of the Teachings.
4. The close touch of the National Office or Teaching Committees with the work is most essential, so that through reports and correspondence not only is information obtained and verified, but stimulation and encouragement is given.
5. Expansion and consolidation go hand in hand.