

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Ridván 153

To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Latin America and the Caribbean

Dearly loved Friends,

As you contemplate the challenges awaiting you during these closing years of the century, you may draw confidence from the knowledge that your past endeavors have been abundantly blessed by divine confirmation. Some sixty years ago, when the Guardian had called for the establishment of at least one center in each of the Central and South American Republics, he wrote of “the strenuous and organized labors by which future generations of believers in the Latin countries must distinguish themselves.” Addressing the friends in the Caribbean some years later in a letter written shortly after the formation of the Spiritual Assembly of the Greater Antilles, he urged them to exert “continuous and systematic effort,” to evince “unyielding determination” and to display “wholehearted consecration.” Your achievements during the intervening decades have amply demonstrated your capacity to meet his expectations. You have proved by the spirit animating your efforts to be well deserving of such tributes as “staunch,” “warmhearted,” “eager,” “spiritually minded.”

The central concern of the plans that will guide your endeavors during the coming four years will be to effect a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This challenge you will not be facing as novices. You have accumulated through successive plans valuable experience which must now be brought to bear on the aim of the Four Year Plan with clarity and single-mindedness. Your success will depend on the degree to which you can, on the one hand, intensify activity in the areas that have already witnessed large-scale expansion and, on the other, exploit the fresh opportunities presented to you as a result of your growing involvement in the affairs of society.

Your numerical strength lies in those many regions where, over the decades, intense teaching activities have been undertaken among diverse populations. Through these exertions, large numbers from most of the indigenous tribes—singled out by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to be the recipients of special favors and promises—as well as people of the African, Asian and European races, have enlisted under the banner of the Faith. As a result, your community now boasts of a harmonious blend of groups from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Plans focusing on these areas of large-scale expansion will necessarily seek to mobilize an appreciable number of believers within each population not only to labor diligently in their own local communities, but also to serve as long- and short-term pioneers and visiting teachers in other localities. Training programs, with which many of your communities have considerable experience, constitute a most potent instrument for the accomplishment of such a vast mobilization. We call upon you, then, to support the work of the training institutes in your countries, the more experienced among you giving generously of their time as teachers so that courses can be offered widely and consistently. As you acquire new knowledge and skills through these programs, you will be able to put into practice with enthusiasm and zeal what you have learned, and arise to shoulder the manifold responsibilities that accelerated expansion and consolidation demand.

This mobilization will greatly facilitate the development of local communities, a task that in the past has not been an easy one to accomplish. Your labors in this field of endeavor must now be systematically and vigorously multiplied, utilizing the valuable methods and approaches that have been devised in many of your countries in recent years. A host of dedicated workers is needed within each population who, supported by Auxiliary Board members, regional committees and institutes, focus their energies on the strengthening of community after community. Let those of you who arise, even when you can find but a handful of believers in a locality, gather them

together, broaden their vision, and raise their awareness of the greatness of the Cause they have embraced. Help the Local Spiritual Assembly to launch the community on a path of systematic expansion and consolidation, bringing in new recruits or revitalizing those who, having accepted the Faith years ago, have seen their enthusiasm wane. Remember, moreover, that in this process of community building the education of children—without which the victories of a whole generation may be lost—must be given due emphasis.

While paying close attention to areas of large-scale expansion, you should not lose sight of the fact that your nations have undergone profound change over the past decades, resulting in increased receptivity to the Faith in many sectors of society. You have, in each of your national communities, developed remarkable capacity to interact with society at large. Through your extensive work in social and economic development, especially in the area of education, through your discourse on issues such as the preservation of the environment and the organization of social action, through your substantive interactions with leaders of thought, you are developing a keen understanding of the needs and aspirations of your peoples which enhances your ability to present the Faith to a wide range of interests.

Together with your increased involvement in the affairs of society, you will need to make a concerted effort to attract receptive souls from diverse groups, teaching them and confirming them in the Faith. In this respect, the climate of search prevailing among both the leaders and the masses in your countries, which has emerged following the ideological upheaval of recent years, is of special significance. Two sectors have been particularly and differently affected and are athirst for the life-giving waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: on the one hand, the teachers in the national school systems and, on the other, university students and their professors. Historically, both have exerted widespread influence in your societies, and should you teach them systematically, you will certainly reap abundant fruits.

In all of this great endeavor—pursuing large-scale expansion and consolidation, furthering the work of external affairs and carrying out activities of social and economic development—you must be driven by a passion to teach the Faith. Let regular study of the Writings feed the flame of your enthusiasm. Let His Words so shape your thoughts that the most pressing obligation of your lives becomes the sharing of His Message with others. The designation given to the Latin American communities by the Guardian as the associates of the chief executors of the Divine Plan has defined for you a vast arena of service. As you take up the tasks of the Four Year Plan, keep in mind the words of the Guardian calling on the individual believer to "... shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused."

We shall remember each and all of you in our prayers in the Holy Shrines and shall beseech Bahá'u'lláh to vouchsafe to you His unfailing protection and guidance, as you boldly go forth to conquer the hearts of men.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]