

The Universal House of Justice

Department of the Secretariat

24 August 1999

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following reply to your inquiry of 14 July 1999 concerning the funding of training institutes.

Your letter has offered the House of Justice a welcome opportunity to clarify certain points regarding deputization, and for this it is grateful. It has also noted with warm appreciation the generosity of your offer not only to raise funds in support of training institutes in different parts of the world but also to strive to meet any financial goal it may wish to specify towards this end. While the friends would no doubt respond well to such a goal, a fundraising approach would not be in keeping with the sense of the appeal made in the Riḍván 153 message to the Bahá'ís of the world for the deputization of teachers by individuals. As that message stated:

“Center your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God,” Bahá'u'lláh thus instructs His servants, adding, “Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation...” Just as one deputizes another to teach in one's stead by covering the expenses of a pioneer or traveling teacher, one can deputize a teacher serving an institute, who is, of course, a teacher of teachers. To do so, one may make contributions to the Continental Bahá'í Fund, as well as to the Local, National and International Funds, earmarked for this purpose.

The individual's duty to teach is the primary point here. Deputizing one's own appointed substitute is also highly recommended for one who can afford to do so. The individual can always exercise the right to choose directly the one he or she wishes to deputize; but often the person wanting to provide deputization is unable to identify or select a deputy. For anyone finding himself or herself in this latter position, the International Deputization Fund established by the Universal House of Justice in 1965 has continued to exist. The new element introduced by the Riḍván 153 message is the teacher at a training institute, whose financial support by another would fulfill the purpose of deputization. The range of choice for the individual wishing to deputize someone has thus been expanded. To realize one's purpose in this regard, one may channel one's financial support of a training institute teacher through whatever institution of the Fund is convenient to one. The emphasis on the Continental Fund in this case is significant for the convenience it provides, since it is through the Boards of Counselors that training institutes needing such support can most readily be identified, and it is through the Continental Fund that the most direct routing of a contribution to its specific destination can be effected. Thus the earmarked contributions channeled through the Local or National Fund would ultimately be turned over to the relevant Continental Fund for delivery to its intended destination outside your community.

It is clear, then, that this new element in deputization is not a question of supporting any Bahá'í Fund and cannot strictly speaking be dealt with as a Fund issue, even though an institution of the Fund must act, in this case, as a channel for the individual's intention. It is essentially a matter of teaching, and it is in this context that the appeal for deputization must be understood by all concerned. Obviously, Local and National Spiritual Assemblies are expected to inform the friends of the importance of Bahá'u'lláh's instruction and to encourage action in this regard as an appropriate response by individuals to the duty of teaching.

With the creation of training institutes across the globe, an added opportunity for a more direct involvement in deputization presents itself to the individual; the House of Justice trusts therefore that the friends can be helped to feel some connection with the specific centers of teaching activity to which their offerings for deputization are sent. It is for this reason that the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries have been called upon to play a distinctive role in this matter as officers bearing a particular responsibility for propagation, for the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants operate at the grassroots of the community and are able readily not only to stimulate individuals to teach but also to urge them, if their material circumstances allow, to respond to the need for deputization. By being able to provide detailed information about current needs, they can make their presentations immediately relevant to any interest shown by the friends. This is why the House of Justice has asked that the Counselors keep their Auxiliary Board members apprised of the level of deputization required by institutes in various regions so that they can make this information available to those who wish to pursue this new possibility.

While, therefore, the Auxiliary Board members are not being asked to solicit funds in the sense of raising money in support of the Continental or any other Fund, they do have the task of arousing commitment to the teaching work, which includes acts of deputization, and they have access to updated relevant information that is needed by friends interested in deputizing. In this connection, the action of these officers of the Faith is directed to individuals and not to Local Spiritual Assemblies or other institutions. They, of course, share with Spiritual Assemblies the responsibility of promoting interest in deputization as an aspect of the teaching work, but their mode of operation places them in an advantageous position to reach individuals in effective, intimate settings.

In sum, the call for deputization falls within the framework of teaching and depends on individual response, as with pioneering. To establish a deputization fund goal would be to loosen the believers' grasp of this important characteristic of Bahá'í life, which enhances individual motivation towards and direct involvement in the teaching work. The Bahá'í institutions must do all they can to facilitate this special expression of individual responsibility towards promulgating the Cause: the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries in the manner described above, the Spiritual Assemblies by encouraging it and providing useful information, the Bahá'í Funds by funneling deputization contributions. Given the situation in the United States, the following advice is offered in reply to your expressed wish to take some action:

1. The adoption of a financial goal for training institute deputization is not required, but you will want to underscore the importance of deputization by keeping this matter before the friends.
2. An aspect of collaboration with the Counselors would be for them to share with you regularly the updated information they receive from the International Teaching Centre on the current needs of training institutes throughout the world.
3. You could offer information and advice to the friends throughout the community as to how the various funds may facilitate their wish to contribute towards the deputization of teachers functioning at training institutes in other countries.
4. You will want to make sure that appropriate mechanisms exist for transmitting to the respective Continental Funds the financial assistance to training institute teachers that the friends pay to the Local and National Funds, together with information as to the wishes of the donors.

The House of Justice is confident that in these and other ways you may devise in consultation with the Counselors you will be able to give effective support to individual efforts at deputization and thus ensure an outstanding place for your community in this vital endeavor.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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