

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

28 December 2008

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of ...

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice was pleased to receive your letter dated 6 August 2008 in which you report on the success of initial attempts in your community to undertake a collective teaching campaign. That the receptivity found in ... society has prompted you to reflect on the nature of direct teaching methods has brought the House of Justice joy indeed. We have been requested to reply to you as follows.

You have inquired about experience elsewhere of teaching the Faith directly, particularly in societies like ..., which are perceived to be secular in nature. You are especially interested in knowing whether the approach to teaching the Faith in neighbourhoods from door to door could be applicable to your situation. As mentioned in the Ridván message this year, the friends everywhere are learning how best to apply a range of approaches and methods in sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message, in keeping with the receptivity of their listeners. In this context the House of Justice has been pleased to see that there are two developments occurring in all parts of the globe, irrespective of the nature of the society in question.

First, the practice of discussing the principles and precepts of the Faith in a general way, which has resulted in a great many admirers of the Cause but few enrolments, is being complemented by an increasingly direct approach to sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message. More often than not, the friends have found the presentation of the Faith outlined in Book 6 of the Ruhi Institute most useful in this respect. It is clear, however, that those making such a presentation need to avoid the trap of reducing it merely to a series of points of information that are enumerated for the listener. Results worldwide leave little doubt that the heart of the listener is touched when the teacher understands the logic underlying the presentation and is prepared to offer it in its fullness. That so many believers who have been taught the Faith in this way have, through study of the courses of the institute, become active supporters of the Cause in their communities stands as ample testimony to the validity of the method. This development represents an important milestone, indeed, in the progress of the Faith.

Second, the habit of conversing with friends and acquaintances on matters of spiritual import, now engrained in the community, is being brought to bear increasingly on interactions with people who could otherwise be regarded as strangers. This tendency is manifesting itself in a number of ways, depending on the circumstances. Not infrequently, outreach to the wider community takes the form of a visit to a home, sometimes after prior arrangements have been made with the residents, although not always. What should be understood in this respect is that such visits are not isolated acts. A visit to a home should be seen as one element of a coherent pattern of action that seeks to enable specific populations to contribute to the construction of the society envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. At the heart of the matter, then, is how a campaign of teaching the Faith by visiting homes relates to the other activities being undertaken in a neighbourhood—how it relates to the efforts to hold meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the wider community, to offer classes that foster the spiritual development of children, to form groups that channel the energies of junior youth, to establish circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of teachings to their individual and collective lives.

Within the above context, it would be quite appropriate, as the House of Justice has noted on earlier occasions, for Bahá'ís to visit the homes of people in a neighbourhood or village to explain the nature of the core activities of the Five Year Plan and invite them or their children to take part. In many cases, a visit to the home of someone to see whether he or she is interested in learning about the Faith would also be highly fruitful.

As you continue to reflect on this subject, you should remain ever conscious of the nature of the mode of learning that characterizes the worldwide enterprise in which the believers and their institutions are engaged. Methods of teaching cannot be governed by hard and fast rules. Clearly those who do not feel comfortable employing any specific direct teaching method should not be obliged to do so. Yet it is equally important that the inhibitions of individual believers, though rooted in the prevalent culture, and undoubtedly the result of a sincere desire to safeguard the interests of the Faith, do not prevent others from learning how to approach people directly and offer them the message for which their hearts so desperately yearn. So strong should be the bonds which unite the friends that the diversity of their temperaments and backgrounds serves to open before them new vistas for the growth of the Faith, while at the same time protecting it from extremes.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat