

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

February 25, 2017

To the American Bahá'í community

Beloved Friends and Co-workers,

1 For the past several months, this Assembly has been deeply engaged in reflecting on both the
2 condition of the society in which we live and serve and the profound responsibility we all bear
3 to present the unifying teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to our fellow-citizens. The process has affirmed
4 both the critical nature of this moment and the necessity of bold action to address the historic
5 opportunity it presents.

6 At this pivotal juncture in our nation's history, our foremost responsibility is to everywhere
7 affirm—in the Name of Bahá'u'lláh—the truth of the oneness of humanity in a manner that will
8 have an impact for decades to come. We must accelerate our efforts to remove the stains of
9 prejudice and injustice from the fabric of our society. As you take up this call with courage and
10 zeal, we ask that you keep the following concepts in mind.

11 The tensions, divisions, and injustices that currently beset America are symptoms of a
12 longstanding illness. The nation is afflicted with a deep spiritual disorder, manifest in rampant
13 materialism, widespread moral decay, and a deeply ingrained racial prejudice. As a result,
14 millions of our fellow Americans, subject to systemic injustices in many facets of life, are
15 prevented from making their full contributions to society and of partaking fully in its benefits.
16 No one is immune to this disorder—we are all members of this society and to some degree suffer
17 the effects of its maladies. That we live in a critical time can be seen in the way essential
18 questions of identity, social vision, and global relations are being raised to a degree not seen in
19 decades. Increasing numbers of our fellow-citizens are actively in search of solutions both moral
20 and practical to answer them.

21 The resolution to these challenges lies in recognizing and embracing the truth at the heart of
22 Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation—the incontrovertible truth that humanity is one. Ignorance of this
23 truth—which embodies the very spirit of the Age—is itself a form of oppression, for without it,
24 it is impossible to build a truly just and peaceful world.

25 The oneness of humanity is far more than a slogan or an abstract and unattainable ideal.
26 It has profound implications for both personal behavior and for the way society is organized—
27 challenging many current assumptions and revolutionizing our conceptions of the relationships
28 that should exist between the individual, society, and its institutions. Awareness of the spiritual
29 reality of human beings carries with it the moral requirement that all be given every opportunity
30 to fulfill their potential and to contribute to the advancement of civilization. To this end, we have
31 a twofold mission: to develop within our own community a pattern of life that increasingly reflects
32 the spirit of the Bahá'í teachings, and to engage with others in a deliberate and collaborative effort
33 to eradicate the ills afflicting our nation.

34 The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith instruct us to work to reshape society based on principles of
35 love, inclusiveness, and reciprocity. This requires that our means be consistent with our
36 ends—that is, by transcending current approaches that tend to divide people into contending
37 groups, raising consciousness in such a way as to bring them together in the earnest and honest
38 search for solutions. The language we use and the attitudes we take, while not ignoring the
39 harsh realities that exist in the world, should appeal to the nobler aspirations of our fellow-
40 citizens. They should reflect assurance that the vast majority of us sincerely desire justice, and
41 must be unifying rather than divisive. Above all, our approach must be suffused with the spirit
42 of the sacred Word, which grants us access to immense spiritual resources. Indeed, it is the one

43 power on earth that can transform the copper of human consciousness into the gold of spiritual
44 perception and behavior.

45 We have inherited a priceless legacy of service spanning more than a century, originally set in
46 motion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. In the past two decades especially, we have obtained
47 important insights into how our combined and various efforts make for a coherent force for
48 progress. The more we understand the framework of action given to us in the current Five Year
49 Plan, the better we can appreciate that it is precisely suited to the needs of the time. We are
50 rapidly gaining the ability to engage ever-greater numbers of individuals in the work of
51 community building who, through a sustained and meaningful process of personal and social
52 transformation, can join together in creating effective and lasting change. The process fosters the
53 intellectual and spiritual capacities necessary to the complex and challenging task of creating a
54 society founded on divine principles. Surely such a convergence of capacity and opportunity is
55 nothing less than providential.

56 The task of transforming an entire society will require a many-faceted approach through which a
57 pattern of life can emerge demonstrating the rich possibilities inherent in walking the spiritual
58 path of love and service. The Universal House of Justice, without attempting to strictly define
59 them, has stated that these possibilities can be considered as falling into the three broad
60 categories of expansion and consolidation, social action, and engagement in the discourses of
61 society. They emerge organically and coherently as a community rises from one level of
62 advancement to the next. Experience has shown how, from the humblest beginnings, a pattern of
63 community life that includes all three dimensions can develop. All three can be seen as mutually
64 reinforcing elements of one process—a process that must be accelerated, for it will generate the
65 consciousness necessary to apply in both word and deed the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the
66 challenges we face, not least of them the challenge of race relations. As it gains momentum, it
67 will embrace vast numbers of people empowered to take charge of their own social and spiritual
68 development and contribute their full share to a new way of life.

69 The activities at the core of our community life are the foundation for great social change. Simple
70 as they might appear, they are, in reality, profound and revolutionary. This becomes clear as we
71 observe systematically applied in action some of the capacities we are building through insights
72 derived from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Among them is the ability to engage in distinctive
73 conversations of a spiritual character. We learn to converse with others about the fundamental
74 purpose of life, the relationship of the soul with its Creator, and the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's
75 advent and His teachings for our spiritual and social progress. We learn to create an atmosphere
76 of reverence and devotion to God in the community, to foster a spirit of friendship and intimacy
77 that transcends the barriers of race and class, to provide spiritual and moral education for young
78 people, to share the lives and teachings of the Central Figures of the Faith with confidence and
79 with sensitivity to varying situations. We also learn to walk with others on the spiritual path, in
80 a humble posture of learning, engaging in individual and collective service for the betterment of
81 the world. These are but a few of many examples. All these activities must increase and grow to
82 embrace multitudes of individuals. In an ever-enlarging number of neighborhoods, for example,
83 we will learn how best and most effectively to work among diverse populations and about the
84 practical dimensions of interracial fellowship. Such activity—and the genuine friendships that
85 result— will help to weaken and eventually uproot prejudice-tainted notions underlying our
86 present social order, and can begin to undo racism in our society.

87 In the realm of social action, it is possible to observe the range of projects and activities that
88 emerge organically from our community-building work and highlight those which tackle,
89 directly or indirectly, situations with a bearing on race relations. We anticipate the emergence

90 of more such activities as we gain in experience and capacity, and as more people become
91 empowered to serve. In the area of discourse, we can explore and develop a conversation with
92 the wider society which, when added to the range of conversations already cultivated by the
93 institute process, can assist our fellow citizens to abandon the language and practices in society
94 that have resulted in an intractable divide, unite on the basis of commonly held ideals and
95 principles, and work together for a social order free of prejudice and characterized by unity in
96 diversity. Such conversations will naturally come about as we pursue the work of community
97 building at the level of neighborhoods, as well as through a diverse array of personal contacts.
98 We can also appreciate activities of the kind in which a host of individual Bahá'ís are engaged—
99 whether with like-minded organizations or in their professions—encouraging more Bahá'ís to
100 similarly take advantage of opportunities in the wider community. At every level, we have
101 much to learn from others who are striving for the same goals and with whom we can join hands
102 in this vital and foundational work. And, through our Office of Public Affairs, we are advancing
103 this institution's involvement in the national discourse on race—drawing on insights from the
104 various experiences of the friends and from our own previous efforts to offer a Bahá'í
105 perspective. A process is already underway leading to a national race unity conference under
106 the sponsorship of this Assembly, details of which will be announced in due course.

107 A key component of our approach is the spirit of learning. This begins with the realization that
108 successfully giving form to the divine principles given to us by Bahá'u'lláh will require persistent
109 effort over time. We will progress as we build on strengths that emerge through experience. If we
110 study carefully the ways various communities are active in each one of the three broad areas of
111 expansion and consolidation, social action, and engagement in the discourses of society, we can
112 identify new insights and bring them to the attention of others so they can be established in more
113 and more places. As we move forward, we will come to an increasingly profound appreciation of
114 the rich potential inherent in this approach.

115 Unity and effectiveness in our work will evolve to the extent that we see our efforts as
116 complementary and mutually enriching. By advancing energetically in all areas, we will apply
117 our systematic approach to learning to such effect that one can envision how, in the decades
118 ahead, Bahá'ís will contribute in an ever more effective way to the eventual eradication of racism
119 in our country.

120 We take as inspiration for our service the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His visit to America
121 more than a century ago. In clear and uncompromising terms, in private meetings and public
122 assemblies, He raised the call of the oneness of humanity. He demonstrated fully, courageously,
123 and consistently, whether openly in large gatherings or in the smallest personal acts, the
124 implications of that spiritual truth, and challenged others to do the same. While acknowledging its
125 marvelous material achievements and aspirations, He unhesitatingly warned of dire consequences
126 to American society and to the cause of world peace if her peoples failed to live up to the truth of
127 the oneness of humanity—especially in the relations between black and white. Above all, He
128 stressed the central and unique role ordained for the American nation in the establishment of that
129 universal peace anticipated by all the Prophets of past ages.

130 Dear friends! Let us follow His shining example with a sense of urgency and with determined
131 focus. Let us consecrate ourselves to the creation of a world in which knowledge will be the
132 province of all; where there are no limitations imposed upon a soul by virtue of race, gender, or
133 creed; where the material and spiritual aspects of life are in harmony; and where all of the truths
134 essential for human progress are held sacred. To do so will require great sacrifice, courage, and
135 audacity. A rich tapestry of community life that increasingly reflects the sublime teachings of the

136 Blessed Beauty will not emerge of its own accord. The evils of racism, materialism, and moral
137 decadence will be eradicated only by a love that is translated into action—such actions as
138 deliberately going out of our way to befriend all, appreciating the indispensable contributions
139 of all, and joining hands with all in the creation of a new world. We believe in the fundamental
140 goodness and decency of the masses of our fellow-citizens. We are confident that Americans
141 yearn as we do for spirituality, that they desire genuine justice and prosperity for everyone. We
142 are assured that America's role on the world stage, however significant it has so far been, will in
143 the future be more distinguished and praiseworthy, not because of any inherent superiority it
144 now possesses but to the degree that its present gloom is dispelled by the Light of Bahá'u'lláh's
145 Revelation. Surely we can, with God's assistance, and together with our sisters and brothers
146 throughout the land, bear whatever pain and difficulties will be necessary to create a haven for
147 a suffering and bewildered humanity.

148 *"Address yourselves to the promotion of the well-being and tranquillity of the children of men,"* is
149 Bahá'u'lláh's call to the peoples of the world. *"Bend your minds and wills to the education of the*
150 *peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the*
151 *Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and*
152 *the inhabitants of one City. Illumine and hallow your hearts; let them not be profaned by the thorns of hate*
153 *or the thistles of malice. Ye dwell in one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will.*
154 *Blessed is he who mingleth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindness and love."* And, in another
155 instance, He counsels: *"It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to*
156 *translate that which hath been written into reality and action. That one indeed is a man who, today,*
157 *dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he*
158 *that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He*
159 *hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who*
160 *loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."*

161 He especially appeals to His followers to seize the chance to make their own vital contribution to
162 the realization of humanity's destiny:

163 *"O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your*
164 *high destiny. Suffer not your labors to be wasted through the vain imaginations which certain hearts have*
165 *devised. Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the*
166 *soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men, the letters inscribed upon His sacred*
167 *scroll. With the utmost unity, and in a spirit of perfect fellowship, exert yourselves, that ye may be enabled*
168 *to achieve that which beseemeth this Day of God."*

169 In future communications, we will comment further on some of the themes touched on in this
170 letter and will also share news of local and national developments. Be assured of the constancy
171 of our prayers on your behalf. Our love for you is limitless, our gratitude to you is inexpressible,
172 and our confidence in you knows no bounds.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

December 8, 2017

To the American Bahá'í community

Beloved Friends and Co-workers:

173 With hearts filled with admiration and deepest gratitude, we salute your efforts
174 to joyfully and meaningfully commemorate the appearance in the world two centuries
175 ago of Bahá'u'lláh, the One Whom posterity will acclaim as “the Judge, the Lawgiver
176 and Redeemer of all mankind.” How infinitely precious was every opportunity the
177 Bicentenary of His Birth afforded us to celebrate—with countless friends and contacts
178 in neighborhoods, towns, and cities across the land—the immeasurable import of His
179 example and teachings and the incalculable impact they are destined to have on the future
180 of life on this planet!

181 In the United States, the Bicentenary events were attended by some 120,000 people,
182 nearly two-thirds of them not members of the Faith. Impressive as this is, far more moving
183 to us were stories we received from hundreds of individuals about their personal efforts to
184 engage in meaningful conversations about the Blessed Beauty and His teachings. These
185 testify to the devotion of the community, the receptivity of our fellow citizens, and the
186 confirmations that descended upon all who arose to share the divine message.

187 Wonderful as those days were, their ultimate success will not be judged by what we did,
188 but by what we now do. This year by no means represented the zenith of our potential as
189 promulgators of this Cause. Rather, it fortified us for bolder and more effective teaching
190 efforts in the years ahead. Our ardent prayer is that the spirit of teaching will so suffuse
191 our individual and collective lives as to make of us a continually growing and invincible
192 force for the creation of a society founded on principles of divine justice.

193 The time has come for a vast increase in the number and range of individual and
194 collective teaching initiatives. Among them, devotional gatherings—where others are
195 invited to join us in prayer and reflection on the sacred texts—can often open hearts to
196 elevated conversations about the life and teachings of the Blessed Beauty. Continued
197 screenings of *Light to the World*, coupled with discussions relating His unifying teachings
198 to the current state of our society, will surely generate interest on the part of countless
199 souls. A great increase in the number of firesides—where seekers have the opportunity to
200 learn about the Faith in an atmosphere of warm hospitality—can in the aggregate serve to
201 introduce many thousands to Bahá'u'lláh's message. Regular home visits will strengthen
202 bonds of loving friendship and will help us to better understand each other's hopes and
203 aspirations. Celebrations of coming Holy Days can have the same impact as those we just
204 experienced. And there is no limit to the potential that resides in creative use of the arts as
205 a means of attracting receptive souls. In all these and other efforts, let us introduce the
206 universal message of Bahá'u'lláh, study His writings, and explore with our friends and
207 contacts their implications for the reconstruction of the world. Let us see each as a portal
208 to service, inviting those so inclined into other efforts in which we can together join hands
209 in applying the Bahá'í teachings to the building of a new pattern of community life.

210 We have made historic strides in recent years, powered primarily by skills and insights
211 we have gained from the training institute experience. Especially noteworthy is the
212 unprecedented involvement of friends of the Faith in the life of the Bahá'í community.

213 Of the 40,000 people now participating in core activities nationwide, approximately a
214 third are not enrolled members of the Faith. Further, they represent a great diversity of
215 ages and backgrounds. The achievement is significant because it reflects the spirit of love
216 and inclusiveness that should characterize all our community's endeavors. It also reflects
217 an understanding that all are on a spiritual journey and all are valued contributors to the
218 task of changing the world. In our most advanced clusters, where hundreds and more are
219 participating, we are beginning to see the emergence of regular cycles of expansion and
220 consolidation, engagement in social action, and contributing to social discourse—in which
221 those who until recently were unaware of the Faith are now actively involved and
222 increasingly taking charge of their spiritual destinies.

223 Such emerging patterns are both an important form of growth and the foundation for
224 sustained expansion. Yet it is essential to understand that a steady increase in the number
225 of avowed believers is also critical and should not be regarded as a separate matter, but
226 a natural outcome of our efforts to foster the development of an inclusive and diverse
227 community. We seek to create the best conditions for every soul to become engaged in our
228 community-building work, to serve and to progress, aware that each person will have
229 different inclinations and move at a different pace. Our approach must be characterized
230 by wisdom—always in a spirit of loving invitation, yet teaching each person according to
231 his or her capacities and receptivity, ultimately assisting as many as possible to recognize
232 the coming of the Promised One of All Ages.

233 On a practical level, we must ensure that each person we engage feels welcome to
234 participate according to his or her interests. Some might benefit from home visits as a
235 prelude to further engagement. Some might attend firesides all the way to enrollment
236 before participating in institute training. Others might be eager to begin the sequence of
237 institute courses right away. Some might attend devotional gatherings for a considerable
238 length of time before taking part in another activity. Some will immediately engage with
239 us in service, while others will take more time. Some may be ready sooner, others later, to
240 formally embrace the Faith. Some may first associate with us as children or junior youth,
241 later to be followed by their friends and family members. In every case, we must be
242 inviting to all yet flexible in our approach, firmly assured that the confluence of all paths
243 ultimately makes for a coherent scheme for progress. Whether serving individually or in
244 teams, whether in focus neighborhoods or throughout our clusters, much will depend on
245 our capacity successfully to welcome, nurture, and walk with every soul.

246 Dear friends! Your achievements during the Bicentenary amply proved the current
247 potential for teaching. Go forward, then, with faith—faith that what you are striving to
248 accomplish is God's will for the day in which we live. That it is His will for humanity to
249 live as one family; that it is His will for every single human being to live up to his or her
250 full potential; that it is His will for peace and justice to fill every land and for love to reign
251 in every heart. Be certain of His assistance. He knows you, He watches over and protects
252 you, and He brings you victory—because you are the soldiers in His Army of Light!

With assurance of our ardent prayers,
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

January 31, 2018

To the American Bahá'í community

Beloved Friends and Co-workers:

253 In our February 25 letter to you last year, we illustrated how the framework of the Five Year
254 Plan provides the most effective means to steadily and inevitably eradicate the ills that afflict
255 our nation—racial prejudice not least among them. In our letter of December 8, we called on
256 the friends everywhere to build on the momentum generated by their celebrations of the
257 bicentenary of Bahá'u'lláh's birth to achieve unprecedented levels of teaching effort. At this
258 juncture, we wish to once again address the importance of understanding our teaching work
259 and the quest for justice as interrelated elements of a single all-encompassing process set in
260 motion by the Blessed Beauty, to be realized through our prosecution of the successive Plans
261 formulated by the Universal House of Justice.

262 Deepening our understanding of the forces at work in our society and the nature of our
263 response as Bahá'ís—especially as outlined in the current series of Plans—is critical to the
264 cohesiveness, strength, and progress of our community. The Supreme Body has observed
265 that wherever an intensity of teaching and community-building activities is maintained, it
266 serves as a strong defense against the forces of materialism that would otherwise sap the
267 precious energies of the friends. The American people as a whole, increasingly frustrated,
268 alarmed, and anxious, are searching for answers and for a way forward. Seeking for truth,
269 they are daily treated to a cacophony of competing voices which, to a greater or lesser
270 extent, rest their respective cases on faulty foundations or bespeak outmoded habits of
271 thought and behavior. Everywhere there is an increasing longing for an authentic and
272 credible source to which people can turn for insight and for hope. As conditions in society
273 grow more troubled, and the needs ever more urgent and pressing, we must strive to fully
274 appreciate both the challenges and the opportunities of the hour.

275 There is a wealth of guidance in the Bahá'í writings about conditions in America, the role
276 it is destined to play in world affairs, and the challenges we are bound to face on the road
277 toward that destiny. We commend to the careful attention of every believer certain
278 essential texts that will both edify us and inspire our services at this critical juncture in our
279 history. Among them are Shoghi Effendi's seminal book-length letter to the Bahá'ís of the
280 United States and Canada, written in 1938 and published as *The Advent of Divine Justice*—
281 especially the sections describing the spiritual prerequisites for success in teaching, which
282 the Universal House of Justice has correlated with the capacities the Plan's framework of
283 action is designed to foster. Likewise essential is the collection of his letters published as
284 *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. These writings—complementing our daily prayer, study of
285 the sacred texts and the messages of the House of Justice, teaching, and other efforts in
286 service—are invaluable sources of guidance and inspiration as we boldly enter the arena
287 of action. Our permanent and seasonal schools will be arranging special programs for the
288 study of these and other relevant texts in connection with the teaching work, and we hope
289 that similar efforts will be made at the local level.

290 We cannot explore all of the themes presented to us in this guidance within the limited
291 span of a single letter. But we do wish to call attention to a few essential concepts. First is
292 the importance of reaching out to specific populations mentioned numerous times by

293 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice for the unique and
294 vital contributions they will make to the creation of the new social order envisaged by
295 the Blessed Beauty. Fresh and revitalized efforts must be made to reach out to American
296 Indians and African Americans. Immigrant groups should also be included for special
297 outreach, as they too have demonstrated heightened receptivity and vast potential. We
298 are delighted that progress is being made in various clusters on all these fronts,
299 particularly among younger people, and increasingly involving entire families. We hope
300 that these efforts will accelerate. To this end, we now ask for a notable increase in the
301 number of friends choosing to live among these populations as homefront pioneers.

302 Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi all outlined the qualities necessary for
303 success as a Bahá'í teacher. Among them are genuine love for all people—a love mirroring
304 God's own love for them—demonstrating in word and deed a sincere desire for their
305 happiness and progress. This is shown in a spirit of humility toward all, recognition of
306 everyone's inherent capacities, a high degree of concern for the common well-being, and
307 behavior that manifests an unbounded sense of loving fellowship. It also entails the ability
308 to walk together with all people on the spiritual path—a path in which insights gleaned
309 through interaction with the Word of God and their application in service are intertwined.

310 These qualities, characterizing individuals, institutions, and the community as a whole,
311 provide for growing numbers everywhere to be together imbued with the spirit of the
312 Faith. We can through systematic action—with institute training at its heart—steadily
313 build the capacity to form deep, loving friendships inclusive of all peoples, as we pray
314 and socialize together as true friends, provide spiritual education to our children and
315 junior youth, consult about the conditions in our communities and act together for our
316 common benefit, and bring insights from the Bahá'í teachings to bear on today's most
317 pressing issues. We can envision the emergence in every locality of a rich and dynamic
318 pattern of life, featuring a growing nucleus of those who have fully embraced the Bahá'í
319 revelation and are active in service; beyond them a steadily enlarging circle of friends of
320 the Faith who are also contributing in meaningful ways to the life of the community; and
321 beyond them, still another circle of those who, whether consciously or not, are being
322 affected by the spiritual powers released as a direct result of these efforts. This is surely
323 the essence of our struggle for a world founded on the principles of divine justice. As we
324 advance, this will increasingly demonstrate to a skeptical and disillusioned world the
325 invincible power of the Cause of God.

326 We cannot too strongly emphasize that the need of the hour is action. Prayer, study, and
327 reflection are all critical, to be sure—but the transforming effect of the Bahá'í revelation on
328 ourselves and on the world can only be fully realized in the field of service. Let us move
329 forward deliberately and prayerfully, but also urgently, to fulfill the sacred mission with
330 which we have been entrusted by the Lord of the Age.

331 We are still too few in number, and the challenges ahead can seem overwhelming. Yet
332 everything in our experience teaches us the vast benefits of serving shoulder to shoulder,
333 of holding to a common vision, and of offering each other loving support. We know that

334 when we try, when we help each other, when we reflect unity of purpose, when we serve
335 together patiently, when we are true both inwardly and outwardly to our principles—
336 growing ever stronger and more effective through both steadfastness and practical
337 experience—we attract divine confirmations and attain victory. What is more, we know
338 that there are multitudes of wonderful, capable people eager to create a better world;
339 people who, if given the chance, will respond with fullness of heart to the divine message.

340 Let us recall the words of our beloved Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, reminding us of the priceless
341 opportunity that is ours—to establish once and for all a world filled with divine love and
342 founded on justice, where every soul finds acceptance and fulfills the true purpose of life:

343 *The Faith of the Blessed Beauty is summoning mankind to safety and love, to amity and*
344 *peace; it hath raised up its tabernacle on the heights of the earth, and directeth its call to all*
345 *nations. Wherefore, O ye who are God’s lovers, know ye the value of this precious Faith,*
346 *obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show ye this way to the*
347 *people. Lift up your voices and sing out the song of the Kingdom. Spread far and wide the*
348 *precepts and counsels of the loving Lord, so that this world will change into another world,*
349 *and this darksome earth will be flooded with light, and the dead body of mankind will arise*
350 *and live; so that every soul will ask for immortality, through the holy breaths of God.*

With assurance of our ardent prayers,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

December 25, 2018

To the American Bahá'í community

Dearly loved Friends and Co-workers:

351 Eighty years ago on this date, Shoghi Effendi, the beloved Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith,
352 addressed a letter to the believers across the North American continent, calling on them
353 to arise with fresh consecration to fulfill the goals of the recently launched Seven Year
354 Plan. Later to be published in book form under the title *The Advent of Divine Justice*, the
355 letter describes in clear and compelling language the gravity of the challenge to which
356 they were being summoned and the vital importance of their actions not only to the
357 victorious conclusion of that Plan, but, beyond it, to the ultimate establishment of the
358 unified, peaceful, and just World Order envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. Since that time, that
359 historic missive has seized the imaginations of every succeeding generation of American
360 believers. Posterity will no doubt come to recognize it as having been of incalculable
361 consequence to an understanding of the essentials of our Faith, and to its growth and
362 development throughout the world.

363 *The Advent of Divine Justice* is suffused with a spirit of loving encouragement. In it, the
364 Guardian describes the immortal deeds through which the Bahá'ís of North America
365 had, by the time of the letter's writing in 1938, already done much to advance the Faith;
366 confidently recalls 'Abdu'l-Bahá's shining promises of still greater triumphs yet to come;
367 reaffirms the decisive contribution America will make to the establishment of the Most
368 Great Peace; and calls upon us to continue heroically to impart our full share to the tasks
369 required to achieve the great destiny ordained for this nation by Bahá'u'lláh.

370 Yet Shoghi Effendi makes it clear that it was not because of any intrinsic superiority,
371 whether spiritual or material, that the Blessed Beauty chose America for such a sacred
372 mission. On the contrary, he tells us in no uncertain terms that, just as Persia was chosen
373 as the dawning-place of His Cause because of the thick clouds of religious fanaticism,
374 intellectual torpor, and moral decay with which it was enshrouded, America has been
375 entrusted with the Divine Plan for its worldwide growth owing to the patent evils deeply
376 embedded in its society. The ailing condition of both countries demonstrates in greater
377 measure the efficacy and healing power of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

378 Reflecting further on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's uncompromising assessment of the ills that afflict
379 the American nation—and, to an extent, its Bahá'ís—the Guardian elucidates at length
380 the spiritual prerequisites for success in our efforts to disseminate the Faith's teachings.
381 Let the reader judge whether these are any less relevant today than eight decades ago:

382 Dearly beloved friends! A rectitude of conduct which, in all its manifestations,
383 offers a striking contrast to the deceitfulness and corruption that characterize the
384 political life of the nation and of the parties and factions that compose it; a holiness
385 and chastity that are diametrically opposed to the moral laxity and licentiousness
386 which defile the character of a not inconsiderable proportion of its citizens; an
387 interracial fellowship completely purged from the curse of racial prejudice which
388 stigmatizes the vast majority of its people—these are the weapons which the
389 American believers can and must wield in their double crusade, first to regenerate
390 the inward life of their own community, and next to assail the long-standing evils
391 that have entrenched themselves in the life of their nation.

392 The American Bahá'í community has been striving to fulfill this twofold mission ever
393 since, chiefly by furthering the successive Plans given to us first by the Guardian, now
394 by the Universal House of Justice. We labor with the knowledge that—while there are
395 millions of well-intentioned souls in our nation earnestly endeavoring to solve the
396 profound social and economic problems afflicting us—there are none but us to conduct
397 the sacred work with which we have been entrusted. And the uniqueness of this work has
398 less to do with our own present capacity than with the infinite powers inherent in the
399 Word of God—powers which must be progressively shared and systematically applied in
400 the realm of action. As recently stated in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House
401 of Justice:

402 “[T]he believers should never, for even one moment, lose sight of the fact that the
403 crisis now engulfing every part of the planet is essentially spiritual.” If the crisis
404 afflicting humanity is spiritual, can there be any question that its solution must
405 also be spiritual? Is it any wonder that Shoghi Effendi referred to the “spiritual”
406 prerequisites for success? Must not that same focus on spiritual truths and principles
407 lie at the heart of the current series of Plans of the Faith? What else but the Word of
408 God can spiritually ennoble, educate, and inspire souls to address the needs of the
409 time? As the House of Justice has explained, the Word of God is at the center of the
410 Bahá'í community's current endeavors: “Central to the pattern of action evolving in a
411 cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of
412 the Word of God.” In study circles, participants are introduced to the study of the
413 Word of God, consider its application and implications, and enter into a lifelong
414 immersion in it, which will shape their knowledge, volition, and action; in children's
415 classes, children memorize and learn about the Word of God; in the junior youth
416 program, young people explore and are empowered by concepts found in the Word
417 of God; and in devotional meetings, attendees recite and are inspired by the Word of
418 God. Even in the Bahá'í community's other areas of focus—projects and activities for
419 social action and involvement in the discourses of society—the Word of God offers
420 insights for addressing the issues facing society and contributing to its social and
421 economic betterment.

422 This guidance makes it clear that the Plan cannot be reduced to a mere set of activities,
423 important as they are. It is rather through active engagement with the Creative Word that
424 we and those who join with us gain capacity to reflect the full splendor of Bahá'u'lláh's
425 teachings. In the many clusters in our country still in the earliest stages of growth, small
426 numbers of people are walking the spiritual path, steadily learning how to create bonds
427 of true friendship and service with others. As their numbers grow, they are developing
428 the means to systematically expand their efforts to include people of all backgrounds and
429 ages. In our most advanced clusters, where hundreds, even a thousand or more, are
430 involved in the life of the community, we can see the first glimmerings of a pattern of
431 action that will eventually facilitate the movement of populations toward Bahá'u'lláh. It
432 is in such settings that we are beginning to confront and to overcome the negative aspects
433 of our culture that the Guardian identified. It is in pursuit of these ever-widening, ever-
434 deepening relationships that we are acquiring a more profound generosity of spirit,
435 practicing the language and behaviors of inclusiveness, appreciating the value of
436 collective learning and action, developing a loving concern for all, acquiring the fortitude
437 for long-term service for the common weal, increasing the capacity for detached and

438 consecrated effort, seeing the empowerment and advancement of others as the meaning of
439 a life well lived—in sum, learning all the expressions of love in action that are the
440 harbingers of a nascent Divine Order. It is in this work that patterns of life are emerging
441 that will serve as beacons of hope to our increasingly bewildered fellow-citizens.

442 We are grateful for the efforts already being made in clusters throughout the country to
443 invite others to join us in creating the dynamics of community life described by the
444 Supreme Body in the foregoing passage. Much remains to be done, however, between
445 now and the end of the current Plan. Far from being unnerved by the negative forces at
446 work in our society—and never giving in to the temptation to expend our precious time
447 and energies on solutions that are at best temporary and at worst illusory—we, the
448 community of the Greatest Name, must appreciate as never before that this is a time for
449 consecrated and focused action to further the Divine Plan. This urgent call embraces all
450 believers, young or old, in every conceivable setting from urban centers to rural outposts.
451 We are delighted at the response awakened by our recent call for believers to serve as
452 homefront pioneers among populations of special significance—including American
453 Indians, African Americans, and various newly arrived immigrant groups. Of some 600
454 pioneers now serving, nearly 200 arrived at their new posts since Ridván this year.
455 Hundreds more are still needed to fortify the efforts underway—from clusters where
456 growth is just beginning, to those where the process is well established and an increased
457 intensity of effort is required. Yet in whatever locality we may find ourselves, the field is
458 vast and the opportunities limitless.

459 In our February 25 letter last year on “America and the Five Year Plan,” we mentioned our
460 intention to hold, in due course, a national race unity conference. Since that time we have,
461 chiefly through our Office of Public Affairs, been working diligently to better understand
462 the nature of the current national discourse on race relations, identify potential collaborators
463 in our own community and among others engaged in the work, and refine our contributions
464 to that discourse through participation in various opportunities created either by us or by
465 others. The work has progressed to a point sufficient that we hope to announce details in the
466 coming months.

467 A few points must be mentioned in connection with the eventual conference. One of its
468 principal aims will be to share not only the spirit and fundamental teachings of the Faith,
469 but what has been learned in applying them in our society. Further, the conference cannot
470 be thought of as a single consummating event. It will be only one milestone in what will
471 undoubtedly be a prolonged engagement with our fellow-citizens on the issue of racial
472 justice. That process will progress in all its dimensions in the years to come—in expansion
473 and consolidation, in social action, and in discourse—in an increasingly coherent manner.

474 Finally, it is primarily you, the believers throughout the country, upon whom the success
475 of this process depends. As we are reminded in the same letter written on behalf of the
476 House of Justice:

477 In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi refers to the arenas, private and
478 public, in which believers are called on to fulfill the spiritual prerequisites of
479 success: “a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities,
480 absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in
481 their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.” Similarly, the

482 House of Justice is now asking the friends to bring such considerations to bear in
483 the countless spaces they have been creating—through their engagement in the Five
484 Year Plan—in the activities for community-building, social action, and involvement
485 in the discourses of society. It is this, rather than the introduction of any particular
486 program into the Bahá'í community or its more extensive participation in any
487 specific movement in the wider society, that will ensure the Guardian's ultimate
488 aims for its destiny and the destiny of the nation of which it is a part.

489 This clearly is not the work of a single Plan or even of a single generation. It will continue
490 until we have contributed our full share, in concert with countless other people of good
491 will, to the eradication of the stain of racial prejudice—together with the defilement of
492 materialism, corruption, and moral laxity—from the fabric of this nation.

493 The social environment in which we are now living is giving rise to demonstrably new
494 levels of receptivity to the Bahá'í teachings. Experience in dozens of neighborhoods; in
495 some 2,000 activities revolving around race unity reported this year by the friends, many
496 encompassing teaching, social action, and discourse; from social media experiments in a
497 handful of clusters; and from numerous other reports are together proving the high
498 degree of receptivity of many of our fellow-citizens. This is being expressed in a marked
499 eagerness to engage in meaningful conversations based on the Word of God and to
500 afterwards join us in the work of community building.

501 The intensity of our efforts to advance our work must be commensurate with the urgency
502 of the times. A vast increase in individual and collective teaching activity is now needed.
503 The challenges of the moment will demand from us a degree of sacrifice which, although
504 different in circumstance, must mirror the staunch devotion of our brothers and sisters in
505 the Cradle of the Faith. Every secondary matter must be set aside for the sake of the Cause
506 of God, so that our unity and singleness of purpose will attract the confirmations of the
507 Blessed Beauty. In this spirit, we can and will usher in the second century of the
508 Formative Age soaring on wings of victory!

509 Though voiced 80 years ago, the beloved Guardian's words of appeal speak to us with
510 undiminished clarity and forcefulness:

511 The community of the organized promoters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the
512 American continent—the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic
513 Age, who by their death proclaimed the birth of that Faith—must, in turn, usher in,
514 not by their death but through living sacrifice, that promised World Order, the shell
515 ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith
516 itself is the sole begetter.

517 Be assured of our abiding love, our unceasing prayers, and our utmost confidence in the
518 capacity of this community to achieve the high destiny to which it has been called.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

November 27, 2019

To the participants in the
"Pupil of the Eye" Conference

Dearly loved Friends,

519 Barely a month has passed since Bahá'ís across the globe celebrated that momentous
520 day, 200 years ago, when the Báb, the Prophet-Herald of the long-promised Day of God,
521 was born into this world. His appearance set in motion spiritual forces of incalculable
522 potency designed, on one hand, to shatter for all time antiquated concepts and patterns
523 governing human affairs that were characterized by ignorance, strife, and conflict, and,
524 on the other, to establish in their place the foundation on which a wholly new order
525 could be erected, resting on mighty pillars of true knowledge and divine justice. These
526 two processes were described by the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, as agencies both
527 "of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos . . . [which] are but aspects of a
528 greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the
529 theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the
530 unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind."

531 In these opening decades of the 21st century, we remain very much in the midst of a
532 struggle to achieve this destiny, so glorious and long sought for. Nowhere is this more
533 apparent than in America. Despite the sacrificial efforts of countless people over many
534 generations to remold our society according to noble ideals and the genuine progress
535 that has been made, we continue to be mired in rampant materialism, sunk in ever-
536 deepening and more deplorable moral decay, and enmeshed in a deep-seated and
537 seemingly intractable form of racism that manifests itself in virtually every dimension
538 of our public and private lives. Even those who have accepted the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh,
539 however earnest their belief, are not immune to the pernicious influence of these forces
540 and the insensitivities and injustices to which they give rise. All are the result of our
541 immature and incomplete understanding and practice of the shining truth of the
542 oneness of humanity.

543 You, the people of color of this nation who for so long have been subjected to wounds
544 grievous and slow-healing, understand well that what the world needs is more than
545 mere lip-service to the ideal of human brotherhood. You know that the hearts of your
546 fellow citizens must be entirely transformed; that patterns of community life must be
547 created that will over time manifestly and magnetically demonstrate the richness and
548 splendor of Bahá'u'lláh's unifying teachings; and that Bahá'í institutions must be tested
549 and refined until they reflect the full glory of His vision. You are only too aware that
550 America desperately needs persuasive evidence of "a true pattern, in action, of something
551 better than it already has." You also know that only the Bahá'í revelation has the power
552 to fulfill these longings.

553 You have assembled at a time of critical importance to the nation's future. You will
554 spend the next few days reflecting on the contribution you can make to the task of
555 applying Bahá'u'lláh's healing medicine to a sick and diseased society. In particular, you

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556 will prayerfully consider the implications of this situation for people of African descent
557 and the special role they have been assigned by the Blessed Beauty Himself, as stated by
558 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

559 *Bahá'u'lláh once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by*
560 *the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through*
561 *it the light of the spirit shineth forth.*

562 This powerful statement provides indisputable proof of the greatness of your divinely
563 appointed station and mission, to be long cherished in the trying days ahead as we
564 together work shoulder to shoulder to build a new civilization, the like of which the
565 world has never seen.

566 These tasks must be taken up in community after community, the Universal House of
567 Justice has stated, in a "sustained, spiritual and social transformation" that will "gradually
568 grow in scale and effectiveness—through action and reflection over time." The Supreme
569 Body further elaborates that it is "[t]hrough collective action in the various social spaces in
570 which the friends are wholeheartedly engaged to translate the Teachings into action that
571 they will, through mistakes and difficulties, with love and forbearance, learn to resolve
572 challenges pertaining to race, both within their communities and in the society at large."

573 Throughout the course of this conference you will doubtless call to mind African
574 American believers of past generations whose outstanding services helped lay the
575 strong foundation on which this community stands. We refer, of course, to such heroes
576 of our Faith as Pocahontas Pope, Robert Turner, Elsie Austin, Hand of the Cause of God
577 Louis G. Gregory, Magdalene Carney, and countless others who stand ready to assist
578 you. Above all, you will surely call to mind the incomparable example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
579 Whose keen and uncompromising sense of justice, infinite love, and ceaseless
580 encouragement set the very pattern of Bahá'í service. Whatever the obstacles ahead,
581 however seemingly insurmountable the challenges, we all have faith in the ultimate
582 victory of this sacred Cause, and in the destiny assigned to America by the Master's
583 unerring pen:

584 *Likewise, the continent of America is, in the eyes of the one true God, the land wherein*
585 *the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be*
586 *unveiled, where the righteous will abide and the free assemble.*

587 We ardently supplicate the Beloved of the World to enfold you, each and every one, in
588 the shelter of His loving embrace, and to bless, guide, and sustain you in all your efforts
589 to spread the Light of this glorious Day.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES