

The Australian Bahá'í

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Launching the
Year Plan
9



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LAUNCHING THE NINE YEAR PLAN

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this magazine contains images and names of people who have passed away.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2022

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

A year of preparation and reflection, as well as of great exertion, has concluded, distinguished by the efforts of the friends worldwide to mark the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, including by sending representatives to participate in a special event honouring Him in the Holy Land. Through these efforts, the inspiration offered by the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá has been felt by countless souls and not only Bahá'ís. His concern for every member of the human family, His teaching work, His promotion of undertakings for education and social well-being, His profound contributions to discourses in both the East and the West, His heartfelt encouragement of projects to construct Houses of Worship, His shaping of early forms of Bahá'í administration, His cultivation of varied aspects of community life—all these complementary facets of His life were a reflection of His constant and complete dedication to serving God and serving humanity. Beyond being a towering figure of moral authority and surpassing spiritual insight, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a pure channel through which the forces released by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh could act upon the world. To comprehend the society-building power possessed by the Faith, one need look no further than the achievements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His ministry and the transformative effects of the guidance that flowed unceasingly from His pen. So many of the marvellous advances made by the present-day Bahá'í community—which were surveyed in our message to you last Riḍván—trace their origins to the actions, decisions, and directions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

How fitting, then, that the Bahá'í community's collective tribute to its perfect Exemplar should form the prelude to its commencement of a major undertaking focused on the release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. The areas of endeavour that fall within the scope of the Nine Year Plan, and of the current series of Plans, are directed towards the fulfilment of this overarching objective. It is also the focus of the more than 10,000 conferences being held across the globe to mark the launch of this great spiritual enterprise. These conferences, expected to welcome unprecedented numbers of participants, are bringing together not only Bahá'ís but many other well-wishers of humanity who share with them a longing to foster unity and better the world. Their determination and strong sense of purpose are reflected in the spirit generated at the gatherings that have already occurred, where the participants have been galvanized as much by the dynamic consultations to which they have contributed as by the collective vision explored at these joyful events. We look with eager anticipation to what the coming months and years will bring.

Since we addressed our 30 December 2021 message to the Counsellors' Conference, National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Bahá'í Councils have been earnestly assessing the possibilities for intensifying the process of growth in the clusters within their jurisdiction during the Nine Year Plan. We feel it would be helpful, for the purpose of gauging the progress made over time, to view the Plan as unfolding in two phases of four and five years' duration, and National Assemblies were invited to consider the advances they expect to see in their respective communities by Riḍván 2026 and then by Riḍván 2031. This exercise also involved a re-evaluation of cluster boundaries, and the outcome of these adjustments is that the total number of clusters in the world has risen by a quarter and now stands at over 22,000. Judging by the forecasts received, it is estimated that, by the end of the Plan, a programme of growth at some level of development will exist in around 14,000 of these clusters. From among them, the number where the programme of growth could be considered intensive is projected to climb to 11,000 over the same time period. And of these, it is anticipated that the number of clusters where the third milestone has been passed will rise above 5,000 by 2031. Without question, to make such advances will entail colossal effort over the entire duration of the Plan. Yet we find these to be worthy aspirations towards which to strive, for they represent an ambitious but serious appraisal of what lies within reach.

This is telling. Such objectives could not be realistically contemplated if administrative institutions and agencies had not evolved markedly, endowing them with significantly heightened capacity to manage the affairs of a community whose activities have multiplied so quickly, embracing a vast and growing number of kindred souls. It would not be possible to aspire to such growth if a desire to learn—to act, to reflect, to capture insights, and to absorb the insights emerging elsewhere—had not been cultivated at all levels, extending to the grassroots of the community. And the effort implied by such projections would hardly be feasible if a systematic approach to the teaching work and to human resource development had not become increasingly manifest in the Bahá'í world. All this has brought about an advance in the Bahá'í community's awareness of its own identity and purpose. A determination to be outward looking in the process of community-building had already become an established aspect of culture in many, many places; it has now blossomed, in a rising number of communities, into a sense of real responsibility for the spiritual and material progress of larger and larger groups within society, well beyond the membership of the Bahá'í community itself. The efforts of the friends to build communities, to engage in social action, and to contribute to the prevalent discourses of society have

cohered into one global enterprise, bound together by a common framework for action, focused on helping humanity to establish its affairs on a foundation of spiritual principles. The significance of the developments we have described, reaching this point one hundred years after the inauguration of the Administrative Order, cannot be overlooked. In the extraordinary rise in capacity that has occurred in the last two decades—and which has made it possible for the Bahá'í world to view its endeavours in terms of the release of the society-building power of the Faith—we see incontrovertible evidence that the Cause of God has entered the sixth epoch of its Formative Age. We announced last Ridván that the widespread phenomenon of large numbers participating in Bahá'í activities, being kindled by faith, and acquiring the skills and abilities to serve their communities signalled that the third epoch of the Master's Divine Plan had commenced; thus, the One Year Plan, at its inception then and at its conclusion now, has come to mark a set of historic advances made by the company of the faithful. And at the threshold of a new, mighty undertaking, this united body of believers stands ready to seize the possibilities wide open before it.

A prominent feature of the epoch that now ends was the erection of the last of the continental Houses of Worship and the initiation of projects to establish Houses of Worship at the national and local levels. Much has been learned, by Bahá'ís the world over, about the concept of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* and the union of worship and service it embodies. During the sixth epoch of the Formative Age, much more will be learned about the path that leads from the development within a community of a flourishing devotional life—and the service which it inspires—to the appearance of a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. Consultations are beginning with various National Spiritual Assemblies, and as these proceed, we will periodically announce places where a Bahá'í House of Worship will be raised up in the coming years.

Our joy at seeing the community of the Greatest Name go from strength to strength is tempered by our deep sorrow at seeing the persistence of conditions and conflicts in the world that create misery and desperate suffering—in particular, at observing the recrudescence of destructive forces that have disordered international affairs while visiting horrors upon populations. We know well and are reassured that, as Bahá'í communities have repeatedly demonstrated in many different contexts, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are committed to offering relief and support to those around them, no matter how straitened their own circumstances. But until humanity as a whole undertakes to establish its affairs on foundations of justice and truth, it is, alas, fated to stagger from one crisis to another. We pray that, if the recent outbreak of war in Europe is to yield any lessons for the future, it will serve as an urgent reminder of the course that the world must take if it is to attain genuine and enduring peace. The principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh to the monarchs and presidents of His time, and the weighty responsibilities with which He charged rulers past and present, are perhaps even more pertinent and imperative today than when they were first recorded by His Pen. For Bahá'ís, the inexorable advance of the Major Plan of God—bringing with it ordeals and upheavals, but ultimately impelling humanity towards justice, peace, and unity—is the context within which the Minor Plan of God, with which the believers are chiefly occupied, unfolds. The dysfunctional state of present-day society makes the need for the release of the society-building power of the Faith abundantly clear and pressing. We cannot but expect that, for now, convulsions and disturbances will continue to afflict the world; you will no doubt appreciate, then, why every earnest supplication we offer for all God's children to be relieved from bewilderment and bitter hardship is coupled with an equally heartfelt prayer for the success of the much-needed service you are rendering for the Cause of the Prince of Peace.

In every cluster where the activities of the Plan are gaining momentum, we see the development of communities with the noble characteristics we described in the 30 December 2021 message. As societies experience stresses of various kinds, the followers of the Abhá Beauty must stand out more and more for their qualities of resilience and rationality, for their standard of conduct and their adherence to principle, and for the compassion, detachment, and forbearance they demonstrate in their pursuit of unity. Time and again, the distinctive characteristics and attitudes shown by the believers in periods of acute difficulty have prompted people to turn to Bahá'ís for explanation, counsel, and support, especially when the life of a society has been upset by peril and unforeseen disruptions. In sharing these observations, we are mindful that the Bahá'í community itself also experiences the effects of the forces of disintegration at work in the world. Moreover, we are conscious that the greater the friends' efforts to promote the Word of God, the stronger the countervailing forces they will encounter, sooner or later, from various quarters. They must fortify their minds and spirits against the tests that are sure to come, lest these impair the integrity of their endeavours. But the believers know well that whatever storms lie ahead, the ark of the Cause is equal to them all. Successive stages of its voyage have seen it weather the elements and ride the waves. Now it is bound for a new horizon. The confirmations of the Almighty are the gusts that fill its sails and propel it towards its destination. And the Covenant is its lodestar, keeping the sacred vessel set on its sure and certain course. May the hosts of heaven send blessings upon all who sail within.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

World Conferences Come to Australia!



The spiritual pulse generated at the gathering for the commemoration of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Bahá’í World Centre at the end of last year has now been felt throughout the world via the World Conferences called for by the Universal House of Justice. Our special coverage of the Launch of the Nine Year Plan starts with these World Conferences held in Australia—a befitting start for a momentous nine years.



The first conference in Australia was held in Perth at the end of February in the Optus Stadium, one of the largest venues in Perth.



People around the globe have gathered together in over 10,000 conferences during the preceding four months under the banner of building a unified vision for the betterment of the world.

Invited by the Universal House of Justice, the conferences provided a unique opportunity to consult and learn how to foster vibrant communities based on the teachings of the Faith and continue to serve the needs of society.

In Australia, over ninety conferences took place across the continent, in large and small settings, with participants meeting to discuss how they can apply the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh to channel their energies for the promotion of unity and service to their fellow citizens. By the end of May, over 13,000 participants from all walks of life engaged in the conferences.

The conferences have been a joyous celebration through artistic expression in music, dance, drama, poetry, audio and visual arts, with a focus on Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for humanity, the achievements of the community of the Greatest Name, and with a sense of anticipation and planning for what is to come as we launch this great “spiritual enterprise”: the first chapter of the Nine Year Plan.

Conference Themes

Bahá’u’lláh exhorts that “*the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world*”. Through these conferences, participants shared the aims and goals of the society-building power of the Faith, with their fellow well-wishers of humanity. The gatherings offered an inclusive atmosphere, which allowed friends to share the vision of Bahá’u’lláh with friends, neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances who wish to foster unity and create a better world.

Through sharing stories and reflecting on past activities and efforts, the participants were able to see the milestones traversed in their local areas by people from all walks of life, who continue to strive to apply Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for humanity. This celebration of milestones demonstrates the resilience of the friends, and allowed for the conference participants to acknowledge, learn and share from past experiences, as well as looking to neighbouring areas to continue to collaborate and work together to strengthen the work of the Faith.

An integral feature of the conferences was the use of the arts in strengthening



In Melbourne, a Meetup group gathers regularly in cafés to discuss spiritual topics relating to the Bahá’í Faith. Some members of this group attended the Melbourne Central and West conference and shared their experiences with the participants.



Brisbane, Qld



Adelaide, SA



Northern Beaches, NSW

an understanding of the community-building process. Through videos, poems, songs, presentations and dramatic arts, participants of all ages were able to contribute and share their experiences and learn from one another.

The vibrant displays of creative and artistic performances and workshops provided the participants with an opportunity to celebrate the strength and achievements of the Faith, in an engaging and meaningful way. Where the community-building efforts were strong in a particular cluster, neighbourhood or locality, the use of the arts was a marked characteristic of the conferences and arose organically from the participants.

With a continued focus on the Training Institute and the educational endeavours of the Faith, the friends participating in the conferences were provided with a fresh surge of energy to continue their efforts in community-building activities, with many feeling confirmed to start or continue activities in their neighbourhoods, and encouraged to invite friends and new acquaintances to join in their pursuits.

The ardent participation by friends and well-wishers of humanity of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life has resulted in the strengthened vision for the path ahead for humanity, as well as a commitment of the friends to continue their unwavering and steadfast work to build vibrant communities across Australia.

Impacts on the Participants

Many participants of the conferences noted that they held a desire to invite more friends, and acquaintances to participate in the conferences, as the themes were universal. Consequently, many participants felt inspired to organise their own conferences in local settings, homes and neighbourhoods, which resulted in many more conferences occurring and continuing to be organised.

The participants were provided with an opportunity to re-evaluate and consider their contribution to the community-building efforts and how



Adelaide, SA



Sunshine Coast, Qld

they will contribute to the Nine Year Plan. For some participants who had felt on the periphery of the community-building efforts, particularly due to the preceding two years of lockdowns and periods of isolation, the conferences provided the opportunity for friends to re-engage with the community-building efforts.

Collaboration

In planning and carrying out the conferences, individuals, communities and institutions of the Faith were provided an opportunity to strengthen their collaboration with one another. In some larger conferences, there were hundreds of volunteers engaging in the organisation and preparation of the conference, with several Local Spiritual Assemblies and task forces across each area driving the preparation and execution of the conferences.

This outcome will assuredly assist the protagonists of the Faith in developing their capacities for future endeavours, an invaluable outcome as the friends mark the commencement of the Nine Year Plan.

As outlined in the recent Ridván Message, the Universal House of Justice affirms that the current series of Plans are directed towards releasing the society-building power of the Faith, in ever-greater measures. The conferences have brought together not only Bahá'ís, but many well-wishers of humanity, who share a desire to foster unity and contribute to the betterment of the world.

In relation to the friends in attendance, the Universal House of Justice remarked that, “*Their determination and strong sense of purpose are reflected in the spirit generated at the gatherings that have already occurred, where the participants have been galvanized as*

much by the dynamic consultations to which they have contributed as by the collective vision explored at these joyful events”. The opportunity for friends in Australia to connect with the global plans of the Universal House of Justice and international Bahá'í community was a significant outcome of the conferences, which will provide the friends with continued support in their community-building endeavours.

With over 10,000 conferences being held across the globe and unprecedented numbers in attendance, the series of conferences has marked and celebrated the launch of the next chapter in the history of the Faith. This new chapter will undoubtedly yield immeasurable results for the continued and dedicated efforts of the community in progressing the aims of the Faith in Australia, and abroad.



The conferences are held in a variety of formats and settings. The conference on Thursday Island is held weekly at the Bahá'í Centre. Back row L to R: Josiane Gushtaspi, Monerih Jamali, Bayan Yazdani, Olinga Yaganegi, Joshua Toloui-Wallace. Seated L to R: May Nona, Margaret Patricia Gabey, Ina Apuita, Anne Akee.

Margaret Bluett Speaks About 1963 at the Cairns Conference

Friends gathered at the World Conference in Cairns were shown excerpts of the film commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, *Glimpses of One Hundred Years of Endeavour*. This included photos from the first Bahá'í World Congress, held in 1963 at the Royal Albert Hall in London, England. It was attended by 6,000 Bahá'ís and its purpose was to announce and present the newly elected Universal House of Justice.

One of the Bahá'ís who attended that gathering and who was in attendance at the Cairns conference was Mrs Margaret Bluett. She is one of a small number of Australian Bahá'ís who provide a living link between the First World Congress and the World Conferences now called by the Universal House of Justice. She delighted the participants at the conference with her recollections of the election of the Universal House of Justice and of the Congress, also known as the Most Great Jubilee. There is no doubt that her heartfelt, and at times humorous reflections penetrated the hearts of the listeners and will serve as an inspiration for acts of service in the months and years ahead.

Mrs Bluett shared that at the time the Hands of the Cause called the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies to the Holy Land to elect the first Universal House of Justice, her husband was serving as Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia. She recalled how nineteen delegates—all Treasurers of their respective National Assemblies—were chosen to be the tellers for the convention, among them her husband. She recalled that though the teller process at the international convention is now very sophisticated, in 1963 the tools used were simply paper and pencils. Thus the process of counting the votes took 26 hours.

When the counting of the votes was complete and the tellers all agreed on the outcome, the delegates gathered for the announcement. The announcement was preceded by the recitation of the Tablet of Carmel, a small excerpt from which was read by Mrs Bluett at the Cairns conference:

His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt. ... Ere long will God

sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.

"Imagine", she said, her voice shaky with emotion, "how they felt!"

Following the election of the Universal House of Justice, Mrs Bluett attended the Most Great Jubilee in London. She had been specifically requested by Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum to accompany Uncle Fred Murray, one of the first Aboriginal Australians to declare his recognition of the Lord of the Age, to the Congress.

Uncle Fred joined the thousands of people from all over the world gathered at the Congress—many of whom, at the encouragement of the Universal House of Justice, were in their traditional dress—thus demonstrating the vibrant diversity of the united worldwide Bahá'í community.

Rúhíyyih Khánum found Uncle Fred where he was seated at the back of the hall, and brought him (along with Mrs Bluett) to join her, her fellow Hands of the Cause, and members of the Universal House of Justice, in the front row, for the entirety of the Congress.

After the Congress, Howard Harwood, another Australian who was present, shared his memory of what Uncle Fred said during that joyous occasion:

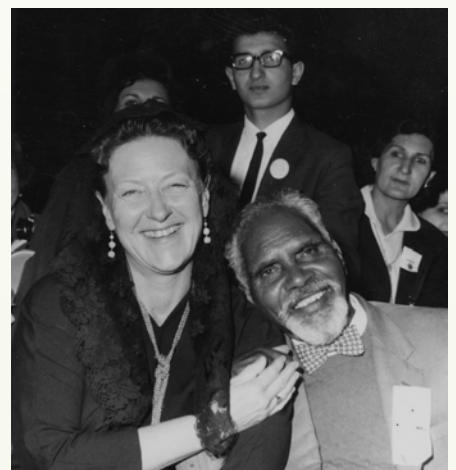
I have come like a giant kangaroo across the world to stand at this stage and tell world how happy I am to be a Bahá'í. ... When I was a baby my people died, I thought I have no people, but now I am a Bahá'í you are all my people... We're all one, all of the people, all one now, all in one family.

Sixty years later, friends gathered in Cairns to participate in a conference embedded in the series of World Conferences; conferences which are "carrying to the friends in every land the spiritual energy released by the gatherings in the Holy Land, as the community prepares for a dynamic thrust forward with the launch of the Nine Year Plan"; giving participants "an opportunity to gain greater insight into the nature of the spiritual enterprise in which they are engaged, a sense of the distance traversed thus far, and a deeper understanding of the exigencies of the current stage in the unfoldment of the

Divine Plan"; enhancing appreciation of "the privilege of being part of a community that has set its gaze upon the spiritual and material transformation of society"; and fostering recognition of "the bounty of being connected by bonds of love and camaraderie with brothers and sisters in a global effort, ...labouring within the same framework for action, ... united under the sheltering shadow of the Covenant."

Friends travelled from Thursday Island in the North, Mount Isa in the West, Mackay in the South and from many, many other places to spend two full days and nights together singing, dancing, drumming, story-telling, painting, weaving, consulting, reflecting and planning. Friends reflecting the rich and diverse cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal Australia, the Torres Strait Islands, Aotearoa New Zealand, Central African Republic, the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, North America, Europe and many more united as a single family, or rather a single body, under the banner of the Lord of the Age.

Nearly sixty years separate the First World Congress from this series of global conferences; a period that has seen transformation of a magnitude unimaginable by the participants of the gathering in 1963. Well might it be asked what victories the Nine Year Plan and the decades beyond might hold for the Cause of God, for the community of the Greatest Name, and for all well-wishers who labour alongside that community, within the framework of the Divine Plan for the betterment of humanity?



Uncle Fred Murray, one of Australia's first Aboriginal Bahá'ís, with Rúhíyyih Khánum at the Most Great Jubilee in London, 1963.

Conference in the Spiritual Heart of Australia

The conference held in Mbantua, also known as Alice Springs, was held for residents of the vast area of the Northern Territory and the north of Western Australia over two days in early May. Many First Nations people attended and expressed their joy at their experience of their local community-building process and their connection to the Bahá'í Faith.



Elaine Wiggan (leaning out, furthest on right) from Broome and her family together with Carmen Fricker (front, second from left), Gee Tajoldini and Jordan Ala'i (not pictured) travelled 1700 kilometres from the shores of the Indian Ocean to the red centre of Australia in order to attend the Mbantua (Alice Springs) conference.



Gibson John (standing) and Robert Jennings (seated) co-chaired the conference.



Turtle shells with Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá and the ringstone symbol.

The Smoking ceremony at the start of the Anwernekenhe conference held at the Alice Springs Convention Centre.

Joyful Days of Desert Travel to Reach the Conference

Some conference participants travelled for days to reach the conference in Mbantua (Alice Springs). One group hired a ten seater van and left Broome at 5am on Wednesday morning, travelling 36 hours to reach Alice Springs. Four drivers tag-teamed during the journey, driving in intervals and sleeping on the bus along the way. In an impressive feat of punctuality they arrived in Alice Springs at 5pm on Thursday—just 30 minutes before the conference registration opened.

Other conference participants travelled from the mid-west and south-west of Western Australia, South Australia as well as the Top End of Northern Territory. Some overcame their fear of air travel to join friends from Alice Springs, Hidden Valley and Santa Teresa at the conference.

The Anwernekenhe Conference Begins

The conference was called the Anwernekenhe conference. Anwernekenhe means “together as one” in the East Arrente language. The Welcome to Country was conducted by Traditional Owners Darryl and Phyllis Stevens. This was followed by a smoking ceremony for conference participants conducted by Darryl Stevens and Gibson John.

The conference was attended by Counsellor Daniel Pierce and National Spiritual Assembly members Fiona Scott and Reena Torabi, as well as members of the Bahá'í Council for Western and Central Australia and the Auxiliary Board. It was chaired by Bahá'í Aboriginal Elder Gibson John, who has been spearheading the institute process in the local area, and another member of the Alice Springs Bahá'í Community, Robert Jennings.

Moving Demonstration of Respect for Local Elders

The visitors from Broome presented highly respected and active Bahá'ís from Central Australia Maxine John, Gibson John and Emily John with decorated turtle shells with Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá and the ringstone symbol prominently displayed. This moving act gave thanks to the Bahá'ís from Central Australia who had uplifted the friends in Broome during their travel teaching trip in 2019/20 and had also gifted the Broome friends some Bahá'í artwork.

The Arts



The conference programme was carefully planned by the Bahá'ís of the Central Desert and Mbantua (Alice Springs) area. As was the case for every conference in Australia, the arts had an important place at the conference. After completing sessions about Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity and the distance traversed, Bahá'í Aboriginal friends taught art techniques from their traditions to the conference participants.

Maxine John (left) participating in an art activity at the Anwernekenhe conference. Maxine is a devoted Bahá'í Aboriginal Elder from Santa Teresa and member of the Area Teaching Committee for the MacDonnell cluster.

Friendships Made and Strengthened



Some of the members of the youth empowerment program team in Alice Springs. L to R: Horiana James, Aisleen Jako, Nerissa McMillan, Emily John, and Erica McMillan.



Conference participants sitting on tarpaulins outside practising art techniques they learned from Bahá'í Aboriginal friends.

Central Australian Bahá'í Sees a Bright Future Ahead

*Member of the Area Teaching Committee for the MacDonnell cluster of Central Australia, **Maxine John**, explains how she became involved in the core activities of the Bahá'í Faith and the vision her community has for the future.*

We started our journey after we heard about Bahá'u'lláh's message in 2000. Mum and Dad became Bahá'ís then, but it was hard to do activities as we didn't know how to do them. And what Bahá'ís were doing was too hard. I went to my first Institute camp in October 2018. I wasn't sure, but Mum told me if I wanted to be part of activities I had to go. There was a meeting in one of the evenings, they call them reflection meetings. Everyone could talk and share their dreams. My young daughter then talked. She talked about her dream: she wanted to have her own school. I remembered that I always wanted that growing up. So, I promised myself I will make this happen. I will support and help around.

But when I went to the Adelaide camp and I finished Book 7, I realised we can do this together easier as a team as a big family. I started to talk to everyone when I came back. I love visiting my families. I love seeing us more united. Now after a few years we have something that we're proud of... we are happy that we are becoming better Bahá'ís. And we are going to seminars, we are visiting our sisters in Western Australia. We love Bahá'u'lláh. Our youth now feel more accepted. We want to see justice for us mob, but we need to do education first. For our youth and everyone else. That's what the Institute gives us because we can participate but we can also run it. Our future looks brighter.



This group of elders from Central Australia, supported by Farid Noakhtar and Kwemetyaye McMillan, finished all seven books during the 2018-19 summer initiative in Shiloh Hills, South Australia.

Standing L to R: Emily John, Eileen John, Michele Leo, Farid Noakhtar. Seated L to R: Gibson John, Kwemetyaye McMillan, Cheryl McMillan, Maxine John.

World Conference at Dubbo



Artwork by Paigan Powell, a Bahá'í Barkindji woman from Broken Hill. Paigan's design was used for t-shirts at the Dubbo Conference. Published with permission.

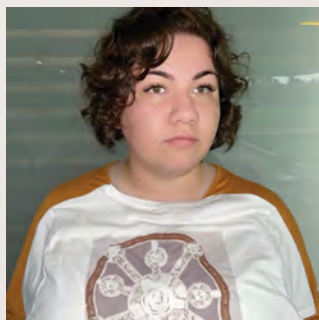
About the T-Shirt Design for the Dubbo Conference

Paigan Powell is a 24 year-old youth from Broken Hill who created the artwork for the Dubbo conference. Paigan declared as a Baha'i not too long ago and has been involved in the community-building process for a few years. Her artwork is inspired by her land of the Barkindji people.

Paigan says that this artwork "represents all the communities/towns/regions/countries coming together to one common meeting place which is these world conferences in the effort to build vibrant communities". The colours represent the earthy tones of the land on which we meet and the external circles are all our communities all linked together as one in the centre, representing one common purpose to contribute to the betterment of the world and one meeting place - the World Conference.

The design was created during the few weeks leading up to the conferences

and was inspired by the materials of the program. Paigan and her mother who assisted, printed 100 acrylic sheets with the design and brought them to Dubbo where a group of youth came together to print them on individual t-shirts with an iron. A lot of love was put into each and every t-shirt that was essentially hand made.



Barkindji artist, Paigan Powell, is pictured with a conference t-shirt featuring her design.

"There was so much love and gratitude to every soul in attendance at the Dubbo conference including Uncle Frank and Auntie Pat, representing the Wiradjuri mob, the traditional owners of this land on which we gathered. Uncle Frank shared a poem on the oneness of humanity as part of the welcome and acknowledged how the First Nation and Baha'i Faith believe in the same thing, that we are one and how we can 'elevate the human experience'."

Auxiliary Board member for Propagation, Nelly Samandari

The Message

I'm Riverbank Frank living here on the river
Here is the message I wish to deliver
We are one people here in Australia
Have to make it work or we're the failure.

You and me, this culture thing
But we're all the same under the skin
We can all share Australia's glory
I'm Wiradjuri/Gamiliroi. What's your story?

The best thing about Australia to me
Has to be diversity
We're all different but we are all one
This is our place in the sun.

I hope some day that we all will see
That we're the answer, you and me
Ain't black or white, it's 'humanity'.
Let's work together to end race insanity.

Written by Frank Doolan (Riverbank Frank) and shared by the author in his Welcome to Country at the Dubbo conference. Published with permission

Dubbo Conference Demonstrates Oneness of Humanity

Eager Friends Travel 9 Hours to Dubbo Conference

Friends travelled for over nine hours in a bus from Broken Hill eager to meet in Dubbo for a World Conference. Others travelled from Mildura in Victoria, Armidale in north-east New South Wales and from areas in outback New South Wales such as Wilcannia. People also travelled from the big cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra as well as regional centres such as Orange, Bathurst, Mudgee and Wagga Wagga. They came from small towns like Coonamble as well as regional cities like Newcastle. From all walks of life and different cultural backgrounds, they met in Dubbo for a weekend of dynamic discussion and creative art focussed on building vibrant communities.

Local Language Honoured

Dubbo is located on the lands of the Wiradjuri people. The team of facilitators for the conference identified a few key words inspired by the plenary program to be included in signs written in both the Wiradjuri and English languages. The Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Dubbo wrote a letter to the Dubbo Local Aboriginal Land Council sharing the purpose of the conference and the idea about including the traditional language for spiritual words and concepts in order to cultivate bonds of oneness.

The specially made signage in Wiradjuri language moved and touched the Indigenous friends present who felt empowered and acknowledged during the conference. The signs were used to welcome friends at registration. We gave them to the elders present in the space who were moved by the themes and spiritual atmosphere of oneness.

Aunty Patricia Doolan, an elder present at the conference, invited the local Bahá'í Community and their friends to join the elders and Wiradjuri friends in an ongoing yarning space and sharing circle to further consult on addressing the spiritual and material needs of the population.

Creative Arts a Feature of the Conference



Local Wiradjuri Elder, Uncle 'Riverbank' Frank Doolan, welcomed conference participants to Country. He is pictured here with Anissa Tavakol from Peak Hill (left) and long-term pioneer to Dubbo, Farzaneh Sedghi (right).

Building Vibrant Communities with Marshmallows and Spaghetti

The two day conference included breakout sessions where interactive activities aided the study of various materials. For example, in exploring a vibrant community, each group did a tower activity where they had to demonstrate what building a vibrant community looks like in action through the use of marshmallows and spaghetti sticks. Some of the key insights was that to nurture and sustain a "structure", support, accompaniment and a strong foundation is required. Certain capacities need to be unlocked such as collaboration, consultation and the process of study, action and reflection to enhance our mode of learning to create something sustainable and vibrant.



Auxiliary Board member, Nelly Samandari picked up friends in Dubbo after they had travelled for nine hours by bus from Broken Hill to attend the conference. L to R: Nelly Samanadari, Peter Hill, Kelvin Thornycroft, Raj Muniandy and Barry Gresham.



Auxiliary Board members serving several of the regional NSW clusters, Helen Matonia (left) and Nelly Samandari (right) flank local Wiradjuri Elder, Aunty Patricia Doolan. With permission from the Aboriginal Local Lands Council, posters in Wiradjuri language were created by Anissa Tavakol, from Peak Hill, just south of Dubbo, with backgrounds by Bahá'í artist, Chandra Hale from Wagga Wagga.



Participants at the World Conference in Dubbo did a group exercise where they built the highest structure possible using marshmallows and dry spaghetti to explore the idea of building a vibrant community. (L-R) David Levick, facilitator Marziah Hakim, Raj Muniandy, Karishma Chand, Kimia Akbari and Chandra Hale drew many insights from the exercise.

The Australian World Conference Furthest South

Travelling from the very east and very west to the very south of Australia, two members of the National Spiritual Assembly, Chris Heggie and Fiona McDonald, reflected on the high attendance numbers of members of the wider community at the World Conference held in Hobart, as well as the delightful use of the arts in various presentations. Hobart's Conference was also blessed with attendance by Counsellor Taraz Naderajah, four members of the Regional Bahá'í Council for South Eastern Australia and two members of the Auxiliary Board.

People came from the north of the state as well as the south to attend the conference at the Bahá'í Centre of Learning for Tasmania in Hobart. School teachers Jennifer and David Pepperell organised the children's program, along with Katie Sahraei and Margaret Mangan. Musicians Erica Davidson and Angela Bryan organised the day and evening musical devotions. Friends from the wider community enriched this conference immensely and participated with Bahá'ís in musical and dramatic performances, such as a Chinese string ensemble, a female vocal quartet, as well as a performance entitled *The Drama of the Kingdom* involving six youth. New works of art and music were created especially for the conference. There was an art exhibition and Angela Bryan composed music titled 'Infinitely Kind' drawing on the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

A special conference space was created for a like-minded group called Sacred Conversations to reflect on their future direction. This is an interfaith community initiative which regularly meets at the Hobart Bahá'í Centre, based on cultivating unity and friendship.

Nepalese Tasmanians, who are part of the focus neighbourhood in the Hobart suburb of Moonah, also participated in the conference. This neighbourhood currently has two children's classes, one junior youth group, and one study circle group with some of the parents attending. Prior to the conference the core team met weekly, some families were visited, youth nights were organised and a picnic in a local park was held, during which the conference and its



The Kuranda conference was held in the home of Afsaneh Zurek and attracted twenty-one people—mostly friends and neighbours who are not Bahá'ís.

A Conference in a Rainforest Home

The world conferences in Australia took place in a wide variety of settings, from large, formal conference venues such as the Optus Stadium in Perth to smaller local halls and Bahá'í centres. One of the smallest conferences was held in a home in the village of Kuranda, nestling in the rainforest on the mountain slopes close to Cairns in Far North Queensland.

Afsaneh Zurek wanted to hold a conference in her home, and with the help of her teaching team friend, Jackie Faulkner, they organised the programme and found that others in Kuranda were keen to participate. Twenty-one people, most of whom are not Bahá'ís, gathered in her home for the one day event using the same conference programme that is used for all conferences. They explored the first two themes—the oneness of humanity and cultivating vibrant communities. Queensland Bahá'í Council member,

Nadia Shahgholi facilitated one session and Afsaneh facilitated the second. Each session included prayers with live music organised by Chantel Zurek and Klare Cairns, short films, discussion, art and other activities. The junior youth joined the adults for some of the programme, and at other times Afsaneh's daughter, Chantel, facilitated outdoor activities for them while Afsaneh's other daughter, Shadi did colouring activities with the children.

"It is much easier to organise a conference in your home", said Afsaneh afterwards. "You can prepare gradually on your own, whereas in a hall you have to set up very quickly. It is also more intimate and friendly when done in a home. People are more comfortable."

Afsaneh acknowledged that organising a conference at home is a lot of work, but she said it is worth it. "We live in a really exciting time", she said. "We push and pray, and we'll be fine!"

purpose was introduced. A number of the Nepalese parents attended most if not all of the conference themes, and they were accompanied by the Auxiliary Board members and members of the core team who helped with the translation and support.

There was much discussion about how others could be engaged in the neighbourhood, which led to some thoughts being expressed on addressing literacy needs within the community. Also discussed was the role of social action in the development of language skills and how involving the parents in the children's classes could assist in this

and help them to become protagonists of their own development.

After the conference the core team decided that they needed to strengthen the involvement of the parents in the children's activities and encourage them to gradually help with the children's classes, allowing the core team to focus a little more on expansion and possible social action. Other outcomes from the conference have been the establishment of fortnightly youth gatherings to help strengthen the bonds of connection, love and support, and some increased action and effort in expanding the junior youth program.

Children Contribute to Conferences

Children around Australia contributed to the vibrancy of the World Conferences. Two children were inspired by the conferences to share their experiences. On this page we include the speech delivered by nine year old Sree Vasamsetti at her local conference in Westmead, Sydney and an article written by ten year old Giaan Price of Wollongong.



The children loved participating in the Melbourne Central and West conference. In the final plenary session their joy and enthusiasm overflowed as they sang songs and spoke about how much they enjoyed the conference. Their excitement could be seen throughout the session as their heads bobbed up and down. Could they share the flowers they made now? "Not now, but soon", whispered their teachers. Soon the session ended and the children spread through the audience sharing their hand-made flowers. Their irrepressible spirit helped the conference participants depart with joy in their hearts.



Children and junior youth from Broome, Northam and Perth enjoying the children's activity at the Alice Springs conference.

Nine Year Old Speaks to Westmead Conference

They say that we live in a vibrant beautiful community and I think that's true. A big part of that is the people in this community and to me, Westmead feels like home because of the kindness people have shown me. The community activities are super helpful for people who move from across the seas to Australia. When we moved from India, I remember that my brother and I did not know English or anyone. Back then, people around the area were helping us find everything and when we went to the playground, we found out about children's classes and the junior youth program which we became a part of. Because of that, we became part of this beautiful community. In our class we do colouring and learn songs and prayers from the teachers. It is really fun and we always get rewards when we do well.

I really want to thank everyone for helping me adjust within Westmead and Australia!

Thank you for listening and may God bless you.

**Signing off,
Sree Vasamsetti
(aged 9)**



Nine year old, Sree Vasamsetti of Westmead, delivered a talk at her local conference.

My Fantastic Experience at the World Conference in Wollongong



Giaan Price loved her experience attending the conference in Wollongong

Participating in the World Conference in late March 2022 was one of the greatest experiences of Bahá'í events in my life (except for going on Pilgrimage which I did afterwards with my family). But these were the best days of my life up till then! I loved that the children's, JY and adults program were all the same but in different contexts. I liked that because it was easier to talk to the adults at the end about what we did because we sort of did the same things.

I was sad that my Mum had Covid and couldn't attend, as she was one of the planners and teachers for the children, but since I was one of the older kids and knew the program pretty well, it meant that I could be a helper. I helped with the songs and dances, the treasure hunt and the harmony tree, which everyone participated in, even the junior youth and adults. We all added a fruit with a virtue to help the world written on it, and then put these on the tree.

We talked about the Most Great Treasure, which is being able to have peace and equality in the world, and I have already talked about that with my friends at school. A few of them actually come to many of our local events.

My cousin Nyla (aged 9) also came. She said, "I loved the songs, like 'So Powerful' which were words of Bahá'u'lláh, and we also did a dance to this song. Plus we had traditional Aboriginal visitors who taught us a song in their language. And there were lots of refreshments".

It all went really well and I was so happy to be a part of it.

by Giaan Price (aged 10)



National Convention 179 BE – An overview

The delegates to the Australian National Convention 179 BE with members of the National Spiritual Assembly and Counsellors Saberi and Nadarajah seated in the front row.

Love for the Universal House of Justice and the institutions of the Faith abounded at the National Convention held in Sydney during Ridván. The programme followed the structure of the 30th December message of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Counsellors, with sessions dedicated to consultation relating to each section of the message. The delegates were guided through both the message of 30th December and the Ridván message by Counsellors Taraz Nadarajah and Vahid Saberi, and the National Spiritual Assembly put focus questions to each session of the Convention relating to the message and the reality that can be seen in Australia. During the consultation of the Convention, the delegates often referred back to the two messages, thus grounding their contributions to the consultation in the guidance from the Supreme Body.

The National Convention, held around halfway through the series of World Conferences, commenced with an overview of the Annual Report of the National Spiritual Assembly to the gathered delegates who have travelled from all over Australia. The Report demonstrated that Australia has started the Nine Year Plan with a firm foundation

on which to build. Like the rest of the world, Australia has laboured under the unpredictability and restrictions on movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years. Despite this, four clusters established intensive programmes of growth during 178 BE, and another two clusters have also traversed the third milestone.

In its Annual Report, emailed to all Australian Bahá'ís on the 27th of May, the National Spiritual Assembly reflected on what lies before the Australian Bahá'í community, highlighting the strengths at hand, and the immediate challenges to be faced.

Uplifting and Instructive Stories from the Most Advanced Clusters

The Annual Report includes stories demonstrating that the core activities of the Faith are being embraced by local residents across all kinds of communities, from rural locales to the most urbanised centres, and among all kinds of populations. Representing all the diversity that is part of the fabric of Australia, it is local residents who are reading the reality of their neighbourhoods, consulting and

implementing ideas to meet the needs of their communities.

In the Brisbane neighbourhood of Inala, participants started a community garden to grow food that is a staple of their diet but not readily available in Brisbane shops. Other projects include homework clubs, English classes for migrants, a food and medicine delivery service, cooking classes that attracts people living by themselves and a support service to help young people develop employment skills and resumé's.

Some delegates observed how important it is that the needs of the neighbourhood are identified by those who come from the neighbourhood, and that the consultation leading to the development of these small social action projects is amongst the local people and not imposed upon by the Bahá'ís.

The Training Institute in Australia

The process of growth Australia is embarked upon could not have occurred without the training institute. In its 30th December message, the Universal House of Justice asked us to deepen our perception of the role of the institute. The Universal House of Justice observes that:

Increasingly, participation in institute courses is preparing the friends of God for an ever-deeper engagement in the life of the wider community: it is endowing them with the knowledge, insights and skills that enable them to contribute not only to the process of developing their own community, but to the progress of society. In short, the institute is a potent means for the society-building power of the Faith to find release.

“A key feature we observe in our centres of intense activity is the strong presence of the training institute, often driven by the youth”, observes the National Spiritual Assembly. “In particular we see a strong pattern emerging for the regular and systematic delivery of the courses and programs of the training institute, in many instances involving the strategy of youth and junior youth camps and children’s festivals”. Residential camps at Yerrinbool and Mount Morton have played a considerable role in this process, so the National Spiritual Assembly

is considering purchasing additional properties for this purpose.

Raising Capacity for Administration at All Levels

The National Spiritual Assembly praised the significant development in the capacity of Australia’s three Regional Bahá’í Councils in its Annual Report. Noting the role of the Councils as “careful stewards of the growth process in their respective regions”, it continued:

The National Assembly takes this opportunity to express its admiration and support for the sacrificial and devoted service of the Council members, and calls the friends to rally in support of the Councils as they lead their regions into the Nine Year Plan.

Given that the Regional Bahá’í Councils are responsible for the execution of the growth of the Faith in Australia, these institutions were responsible for the expenditure of nearly 40% of the National Fund. These funds

were spent on supporting sixteen pioneers and numerous visiting teams as well as leasing fifteen homes for pioneers. Another key area of expenditure was support for Area Teaching Committees and co-ordination at the cluster and regional level.

There was considerable discussion at the National Convention about the need to improve the dissemination of learning and to develop communication processes to deliver information without overwhelming recipients. Consultation also identified the need to provide better support for Local Spiritual Assemblies, especially Assembly secretaries. The outgoing secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, Natalie Mobini, told the Convention that a support desk or team to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies was being considered by the National Assembly. She said the National Assembly would appreciate suggestions about what functions such a desk could fulfil.

Election of the National Spiritual Assembly



National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Australia for 179 BE at the Bahá’í National Centre with members of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia.

Front L-R: Kia Manouchehri, Fiona McDonald, Reena Torabi, Christopher Heggie, Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, Counsellor Daniel Pierce Olam, Counsellor Tessa Scrine, Anton Jones, Counsellor Vahid Saberi, Counsellor Taraz Nadarajah, Saloomah Mohebbaty, Shayan Ta’i and Fiona Scott.

The election of the National Spiritual Assembly for 179 BE was conducted in reverent silence mid-way through the National Convention. Those who had finished voting before others sat quietly, thus contributing to the reverent spirit which is the hallmark of Bahá’í elections.

The membership of the National Spiritual Assembly for 179 BE was announced on Saturday afternoon and the incoming National Spiritual Assembly received a standing ovation from the assembled delegates.

The membership was unchanged from 178 BE. The elected members in order of votes are:

Dr Shayan Ta’i, Dr Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, Dr Kia Manouchehri, Dr Fiona Scott, Mr Christopher Heggie, Miss Reena Torabi, Mrs Saloomah Mohebbaty, Mr Anton Jones, Mrs Fiona McDonald. The convenor, Dr Shayan Ta’i, expressed the love for Bahá’u’lláh of the incoming National Spiritual Assembly as well as its love and respect for the Universal House of Justice.

The office bearers for 179 BE are: Chairperson, Shayan Ta’i; Secretary, Natalie Mobini-Kesheh; Treasurer, Kia Manouchehri; Vice-Chairperson, Christopher Heggie. Reena Torabi has been appointed as Assistant Secretary.



Vignettes of Neighbourhood Development Around Australia

These Vignettes were first published by the National Spiritual Assembly in its Annual Report.

Kensington neighbourhood, Perth

In the Kensington neighbourhood, where efforts have led to the emergence of a centre of intense activity, the neighbourhood has had a strong pattern of engagement with a local primary school, connecting children in children's classes at the school to neighbourhood classes and junior youth groups and engaging whole families to support these activities. In light of the 30 December 2021 message, the friends have been reflecting on how to take a more expansive view of the training institute and examining glimpses of how it has served as a "potent means for the society-building power of the Faith to find release". The friends have observed that as more families have become involved in the community-building activities in a small pocket of the neighbourhood, more people are recognising that the systems in place to support young people aren't sufficient to respond to their needs. On numerous occasions parents have reached out to the local primary school, asking for assistance with mental health and family issues, and the school has referred families to the children's class teachers and animators to support them through challenges. There is a growing recognition that young people engaged in service to the younger generation have developed the capacity to better meet the needs of young people and assist them through difficult times.



Mongolians in Sydney

The friends in Sydney cluster have been learning about responding to the needs of their community in practical and relevant ways. At the outset of the pandemic, a group of mothers from a Mongolian background were able to reach out and ask about the needs of their community. They discovered that their fellow Australian-Mongolians find it difficult to integrate in the community due to language and cultural differences. In October 2020 they formally registered a non-profit organisation aiming at supporting the health and social wellbeing of the Mongolian community, endorsing the Mongolian language and culture. They partnered with similar organisation to arrange activities for the Mongolian Community, including English classes, community information sessions, food delivery and a group for mothers and young children. More recently, they have been learning about drawing on the Institute materials for children, junior youth and adults to further empower their community.

Homework Hangouts in Mt Druitt, Sydney

A barrier to spiritual and material progress identified by animators and tutors in this neighbourhood was the lack of support for children and junior youth in their education.

A weekly space called 'Homework Hangouts' was created where young people, who lacked access to resources to learn at home and were becoming disengaged in their education, could come and continue to develop intellectually and receive help with their schoolwork. They would benefit from having a focused environment to do their own work, free from distractions in their homes. Older youth and adults working as teachers or support teachers in local schools arose to help these young people advance with their academic learning, roaming around assisting as needed. Over time, certain gaps in learning began to be identified and addressed and the team saw opportunities emerging to strengthen a commitment to intellectual excellence within these young people, as well as spiritual excellence. To help broaden their understanding of what it means to strive for intellectual excellence, ideas have been introduced into the Homework Hangout sessions from the junior youth texts like Learning about Excellence, speaking to the importance of asking the right question and having a mind that is thirsty to learn.

More About the Faith Online

There is a wealth of material about the Bahá'í Faith online through the following websites:

The Australian Bahá'í Community website: www.bahai.org.au

The official website of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community: www.bahai.org

Bahá'í World News Service: www.news.bahai.org

Bahá'í Reference Library with a wide range of Bahá'í Writings and messages from the Universal House of Justice: www.bahai.org/library

The Bahá'í World essays and articles: www.bahaiworld.bahai.org

Counsellors Guide Delegates at the National Convention

The representatives of the Continental Board of Counsellors have an important role in providing guidance to the assembled delegates during the consultation at National Convention. This year Counsellors Taraz Nadarajah and Vahid Saberi represented the Board at the National Convention in Sydney.

On the Cusp of Momentous Change

At Ridván, the Universal House of Justice announced that we have entered the sixth epoch in the Formative Age, just one year after we entered the third epoch of the Divine Plan. In his opening remarks at the National Convention, Counsellor Saberi helped the delegates understand the historic context behind these momentous developments in the evolution of the Faith.

Counsellor Saberi emphasised that while each epoch is a distinct period of time—with its own features, goals, aspirations and challenges—they are connected units of time in the unfolding process of the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh. “These epochal units give us a sense of history and the historic process we are engaged in”, Counsellor Saberi said. “Each epochal unit is like another link in a chain. The chain that is connected to the past and to the future.”

The Counsellor illustrated this by reflecting on the evolution of the growth of the Faith since the commencement of the systematic unfoldment of the Master’s Divine Plan in 1937. The unfoldment of the Divine Plan relates to the penetration of the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. During the first stage, the growth of the Faith was in a steady flow of fresh enrolments. This process advanced in the next stage when we learnt about entry of groups and troops coming closer to the

vision of Bahá’u’lláh and eventually embracing His Vision and Cause. On the implications of entering the third epoch of the Master’s Divine Plan Counsellor Saberi said after the Convention, “Now we are learning about the community where the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and His principles become socialised through conversations grounded in the training institute”. He went on to say, “the principles inform social action and the discourses in a community, thought patterns and action begin to change, aspiration draws closer to the Revelation, the society building power of the Cause is released and the Revelation transforms the life of society, overcoming the barriers; social, spiritual and material.”

Counsellor Saberi then likened the vista before us in the first years of the third epoch in the Divine Plan to that painted by the Guardian in *Citadel of Faith*:

This flow, moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá’í world—a day which, viewed in its proper perspective, will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength



Counsellor Taraz Nadarajah speaking at the National Convention at Ridván.

as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

Referring to the last two paragraphs of the Ridván Message, Counsellor Saberi reminded the Convention of the tests associated with the Major Plan of God but reaffirmed that it is with the Minor Plan of God—currently expressed in the Nine Year Plan—that the Bahá’ís should be “chiefly occupied”. In reading the final paragraphs of the Ridván Message, the Counsellor said he was reminded of the words of the Guardian, written in 1941:

“These, indeed, are the days when heroism is needed on the part of the believers. Self-sacrifice, courage, indomitable hope and confidence are the characteristics they should show forth, because these very attributes cannot but fix the attention of the public and lead them to enquire what, in a world so hopelessly chaotic and bewildered, leads these people to be so assured, so confident, so full of devotion? Increasingly, as time goes by, the characteristics of the Bahá’ís will be that which captures the attention of their fellow-citizens. They must show their aloofness from the hatreds and recriminations which are tearing at the heart of humanity, and demonstrate by deed and word their profound belief in the future peaceful unification of the entire human race.

The Counsellor concluded by reminding the delegates of the protection of the Covenant promised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “The Cause will grow within the shell of the Covenant and it will cover the entire planet assuredly”, he said.

Understanding the 30th December Message – A Snapshot

The delegates to the National Convention were the beneficiaries of the insightful guidance of Counsellors Vahid Saberi and Taraz Nadarajah focussing on the 30th December and Riqdán messages of the Universal House of Justice.

Counsellor Nadarajah highlighted the importance of the first four paragraphs of the message. “These paragraphs are the vision statement”, he said. Counsellor Saberi advised assembled delegates to not only study paragraph four about the ‘enkindled soul’, but to memorise it.

Some of the concepts from the 30th December message that were explored in depth during the Convention by the Counsellors and in the consultation of the delegates were:

- Expanding nucleus and outward orientation
- Desire for learning
- Prevalence
- Groupings of families
- Society-building
- Movement of populations
- Enkindled soul
- Social action
- Discourses
- Dissemination of learning
- Empowering local people to take charge



Counsellor Vahid Saberi speaking at the National Convention at Riqdán.

Our Discipline is Key to Withstanding Tests

The virtue of discipline was highlighted by Counsellor Saberi in his remarks about the last section of the 30th December message at the National Convention.

“The House of Justice of course reminds us that what has been achieved in the past twenty-five years has been through an enormous amount of effort and discipline”, said Counsellor Saberi. “And now we need to rise to an even higher levels of discipline”, he said while discussing the virtue of discipline at the National Convention.

Counsellor Saberi noted that the Universal House of Justice said that it was the “present-day capacity of the Bahá’í community, combined with the discipline it has achieved”, that has prepared the Bahá’ís for these tests.

“Learning cannot take place without discipline and persistence”, he said. Using the analogy of a child learning to walk, Counsellor Saberi noted that a child doesn’t learn to walk then take a break for a few weeks then come back to it. “You cannot learn with sporadic action”, he said. “It has to be persistent and disciplined.”

Discipline relates to the habits we build in our lives. “The Guardian says that Bahá’u’lláh places on each of us a discipline through His majestic laws”, said the Counsellor. He listed the various areas that we can show discipline as individuals:

- Personal study of the guidance of the Universal House of Justice;
- Developing our connection to the Word of God through the habit of study and prayer;
- Maintaining focus;
- Constancy of effort and addressing the forces of inertia; and
- Reflecting and acting, including reading reality on a continual basis.





Vanessa John, a Baha'i Aboriginal Artist from Santa Teresa in Central Australia creates a painting during an art activity at the Alice Springs conference. Vanessa's artwork was used for invitations, programmes, t-shirts and as a backdrop for plenary sessions for all the conferences in the Western and Central Australian region.

First Nations People Contributing to Faith Around Australia

The National Spiritual Assembly's Annual Report as well as articles in this and previous issues of our magazine demonstrate that Australia's Indigenous peoples are using the tools of the institute process to become active protagonists for the Plan in their communities around Australia.

At the National Convention, Auxiliary Board member for Protection in the Northern Territory, Mrs Amica Gordon, explained what is occurring in that region and how it is Indigenous people themselves who are leading the process. She said that the spiritual principle of the oneness of humanity and the mechanisms provided by the Universal House of Justice through the training institute is the same for all populations we may work with. It is through the training institute people connect with the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Then the population themselves reads their own reality and they themselves come up with their solutions, not those who are outsiders. She drew the delegates attention to the following learning about social action:

It is important to note that reading the social reality of a population from within is different than studying it as an outsider. In instances where the population in question is relatively poor

in material resources, outsiders with access to greater means frequently see only deprivation—the wealth of talent in the population, the aspirations of its members, and their capacity to arise and become the protagonists of change may all be overlooked. Furthermore, external observers of poverty are all too often unaware of the tendency to allow their own feelings of pity, fear, indignation or ambivalence to affect their reading of society and to base their proposed solutions on the value they place on their own experiences. However, when an effort is participatory, in the sense that it seeks to involve the people themselves in the generation and application of knowledge, as all forge together a path of progress, dualities such as “outsider-insider” and “knowledgeable-ignorant” quickly disappear.

‘Social Action’ paper prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre 26/11/2012

Mrs Gordon concluded by referring to the 30th December message from the Universal House of Justice and their reference to the generational nature of the transformation process. “It takes time”, she said.

About Our Front Cover



Vanessa John and her husband Wayne at the Anwernekenhe World Conference in Mbantua (Alice Springs).

Our front cover features artwork by Bahá'í artist Vanessa John, from Santa Teresa in Central Australia. Vanessa's artwork was used for invitations, programmes, t-shirts and as a backdrop for plenary sessions for all the conferences in the Western and Central Australian region.

The single footstep at the bottom of the painting represents an individual who has been inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and is starting to walk on the pathway of service. The person then meets someone else at a consultation place who starts to walk with them. Then the two people join a community consultation place and continue walking the path of service with the community. They continue to do this, joining more people, each time travelling closer to the vision of harmony and the oneness of humanity brought to us by Bahá'u'lláh, as represented by the Greatest Name symbol in the top left of the artwork.



The painting by Bahá'í artist Vanessa John featured on our front cover and at the World Conferences throughout the Western and Central Australian region.

New Goals and Boundaries for Australia's Clusters

The goal for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith is simply expressed, yet its effect on Australian society will be profound. The National Spiritual Assembly has called on Australian Bahá'ís to put a significant effort into advancing the development of clusters throughout the nation.

The National Spiritual Assembly announced the new cluster boundaries for Australia at the National Convention of 179BE, together with ambitious goals for their development. These goals reflect the historic nature of the Nine Year Plan and will require a mobilisation of people throughout Australia reminiscent of the Ten Year Crusade which commenced nearly seventy years ago.

Currently there are eighteen clusters which have traversed the third milestone. In just four years, the National Spiritual Assembly is calling on Australians to help another 27 reach the third milestone.

These 27 clusters will mostly be regional clusters that don't have a large Bahá'í population.

By the end of the Nine Year Plan in 2031, the National Spiritual Assembly expects that Australia will have a total of 63 third milestone clusters.

In its message to the Counsellors on 30th December 2021, the Universal House of Justice called on National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Bahá'í Councils, with the assistance of the Counsellors, to consider adjusting cluster boundaries. In this message the Universal House of Justice said that "... a cluster defines an area where the activities of the plan can be stimulated

Goals for Clusters	Current State	After 4 Years	End of the Plan
Unopened	7	0	0
1 st Milestone	60	67	67
2 nd Milestone	53	62	67
3 rd Milestone	18	45	63

in a manageable and sustainable way". The House of Justice also stated that areas with sparse population due to the natural terrain could be excluded from the clustering scheme.

The new map of the redrawn cluster boundaries in Australia is shown on the next page. Many, but not all, of the islands around Australia have also been excluded from the clustering scheme as well as areas with sparse population. With the redrawing of cluster boundaries there are currently seven unopened clusters. The goal is for all of these clusters to have attained the first milestone by 2031.

Letter to Delegates at the National Convention

Dear Friends,

[T]he Nine Year Plan will "make demands of the individual believer, the community, and the institutions reminiscent of the demands that the Guardian made of the Bahá'í world at the outset of the Ten Year Crusade"... [W]e look again to the example of our forebears in this country, whose accomplishments were articulated by Shoghi Effendi in one of his last letters to this National Spiritual Assembly, including his moving assurance that the Master Himself rejoiced at their efforts:

The entire Bahá'í World beholds with pride and admiration the great victories won by the Australian and New Zealand communities, both in their homelands and in so many islands of the Pacific Ocean, and shares my confidence that their historic accomplishments, particularly since the inception of the Ten-Year Plan, are but a prelude to still nobler exploits and still mightier victories.

Their exemplary loyalty to the Faith they have so eagerly embraced,

their keen enthusiasm, their persistent endeavours, their willingness to sacrifice, their inflexible resolve to surmount every obstacle, their unity and solidarity, their optimism and courage, are assets which I greatly value, and for which I cannot but feel deeply grateful.

Much indeed has been achieved by these stalwart defenders and promoters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh! ... In more than one way these communities, through their consecrated efforts and the tangible results they have achieved, have set an inspiring example to their sister communities in both the East and the West. The Author of the Divine Plan, Himself, who during the closing years of His ministry, witnessed the awakening of that vast continent, rejoices over and applauds the rapidity with which the light of His Father's Faith has spread over and enveloped that continent and its neighbouring islands.

With this heritage and example before us, how can we fail to arise to the call?

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia



The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand at Ridvan 1953. Back row L to R: James Heggie, Lilian Wyss, Dulcie Dive, Alvin Blum, Gertrude Blum, Collis Featherstone. Front row L to R: Gretta Lamprill, Stanley P Bolton, Ethel Dawe. Six members of this National Spiritual Assembly moved away from Australia and established the Bahá'í Faith in different countries during the Ten Year Crusade, thus becoming Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Just months after this photo was taken Gretta Lamprill moved with her friend Gladys Parke to Tahiti, Lilian Wyss moved to Western Samoa, Stanley P Bolton moved to Tonga, Dulcie Dive moved to the Cook Islands, and Gertrude and Alvin Blum moved to the Solomon Islands.

The Local Two-Stage Election Process Unrolls in Australia

This Ridván, three Bahá'í communities conducted the first Local Spiritual Assembly elections using the two-stage election process in Australia. Participants in the process from Brisbane and the Gold Coast in Queensland, and Blacktown in Sydney, reflect on the historic elections

“What unfolded in the various phases of the two-stage election was a sense of connection – a spirit that was imbued with the Master’s touch”, said the Local Spiritual Assembly of Brisbane in a report after the completion of Brisbane’s inaugural two-stage election process at Ridván. For the first time in Australia, three Local Spiritual Assemblies were elected through a two-stage election process.

The two-stage election process used by the Assemblies of Brisbane and the Gold Coast in Queensland and Blacktown in Sydney is similar to that used for elections at the national level. All three communities were divided into nine ‘units’ who voted for delegates from their local level. These delegates then met a few days later to elect the members of their Local Spiritual Assembly.

“The process of hearing about the two-stage election and having the duty to execute it for our city was not only a surprise but filled us with a deep sense of honour and privilege”, said the Brisbane Assembly. They then said:

This was partly a process of complicated and methodical yet intricate and delicate logistical planning. But not for the reasons people organise events—“so the event is successful”. This was far deeper and special—the Assembly wanted the occasion to be a spiritual journey for each elector and it wanted [to] show love to the community through this process. Moreover, we were mindful of doing our utmost to befittingly execute “an approach which traces its origins to instructions given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Spiritual Assembly of Tíhran” to our highest capacity. In short, we wanted to please the beloved Master.”



Vincent Takizadeh from Blacktown was elected as a local delegate. When reflecting on the experience of the historic elections, he emphasised the prayerful and reflective attitude of the delegates. “It was a very spiritual experience”, he said, “like the feeling when you enter a Bahá'í Temple.”

When asked what were the factors that contributed to the elevated atmosphere during the election, Vincent noted several things. Firstly, he said the elections were conducted in silence. “Delegates carried themselves in a dignified manner”, he added. “You could see how delicate the delegates’ thoughts were during the election process. There was no conversation and they were focussed. When a tied vote occurred, the delegates again performed their duties in that same prayerful manner.”

Shiva Dadvar is a Bahá'í artist who lives in the Blacktown community in Sydney. She has lived in Australia for two and a half years. At Ridván she acted as a teller at Blacktown’s first two-stage elections for the Local Spiritual Assembly.

Shiva’s artistic representation of the election process shows a large number of stars at the bottom representing the Bahá'ís. The stars in a line in the middle represent the nineteen delegates. The stars rising above the delegates are the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly. The large nine-pointed star represents the Assembly. When the members gather together as an Assembly they can absorb the light of God and help the Faith.

Delegates in Brisbane reported a similarly profound, spiritual process. “I felt a deep and weighty sense of responsibility thinking about the fact that my vote was one of only nineteen that would elect the Assembly”, said one delegate. “It actually became very stressful in the days leading up to the election, and I had difficulty deciding on the names I was considering. But the spiritual environment of the election was so soothing and profound that I was elevated and moved to cast a ballot that I felt spiritually guided in writing. I thank the organisers for their care and attention in creating a space that was so conducive to this process.”

Preparation for the Two-Stage Elections

Another factor behind the elevated nature of the two-stage election process was the work put into preparing for the elections by the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, as well as the Local Spiritual Assemblies with the support of the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Spiritual Assemblies had a lot of work on their agendas because aside from organising elections using a different process for the first time, they also were heavily involved in organising large World Conferences. As the Brisbane Local Assembly noted in their report, their World Conference attracted over one thousand participants, which for a community of 787 adult believers, required a lot of work for many volunteers.

The local administration of the Faith had to not only deal with an increased quantity of work but also significantly more complex work. In this context, the assistance of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants was significant.

“The educational process was a key part of spiritually preparing for the elections”, said the Local Spiritual Assembly of Brisbane, noting the significant role played by the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants in helping educate the believers about the local electoral process. In Blacktown, the members of the local secretariat of the Assembly home visited many Bahá’ís under the guidance of the Auxiliary Board members to help Bahá’ís learn about the new process and its fundamental spiritual foundations.

The practical logistics of the

new two-stage election process also needed attention. In the case of each Assembly, they had already appointed administrative bodies such as local secretariats and task forces or committees that were experienced in running local elections and by-elections in previous years. These agencies of the Local Spiritual Assemblies were engaged in the logistics of handling the election process, thus leaving the Local Spiritual Assemblies to a supervisory role. This was a key factor in enabling the Gold Coast and Brisbane Assemblies to simultaneously organise their World Conferences. However, this did not mean the Assemblies did not give attention to the electoral process.

On the election day, the friends must whole-heartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.

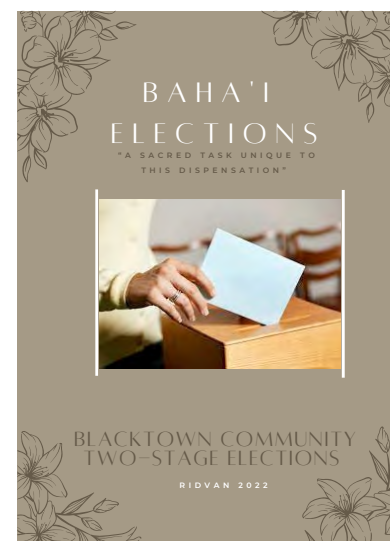
Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the East, 27 February 1923—translated from the Persian

“This was a stage in our history that needed our full attention and dedication”, said the Local Spiritual Assembly of Brisbane. “The elections taskforce and the Assembly representatives met weekly or twice weekly in the lead up to elections. The Auxiliary Board members were working alongside providing support and encouragement.” Uppermost in the mind of the Local Spiritual Assembly throughout the process was to uphold the “dignity, sanctity, and spirituality” of the elections.

As instructed by the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 18th January, each community elected nineteen delegates. Despite the difficulties of the pandemic, the unit elections were conducted face-to-face. There was no consultation during these elections. Voters needed to stay while the votes were counted in case of a tied result. While this was being done in Blacktown, the voters studied material on elections.

Local Elections and Local Consultation at Riḍván

A notable difference to this meeting of local delegates compared to the National Convention was that the Annual General Meeting of the three communities—where consultation about



With the help of the Auxiliary Board, their Assistants and the Assembly's local secretariat and this guide, Bahá'ís in Blacktown prepared for their first local elections using the two-stage electoral process.

local matters about the advance of the Faith takes place—was held separately from the election. On the Gold Coast, the meeting of the delegates to vote for the Assembly was held two days before the First Day of Riḍván, eight days after the election of delegates at unit elections.

Stephen Cole was the Chief Teller for the election of the Gold Coast Assembly. He noted an unforeseen benefit of the election being separated from the consultation in this way. The tellers were able to join in the consultation at the Annual General Meeting instead of counting ballots. For community members often called upon to perform the service of being a teller on multiple occasions, this was quite a joyful experience.

The results of the elections of the three Assemblies were first announced at the Annual General Meetings. “There was a great sense of anticipation as the friends were eagerly waiting to hear the results of the election for the Spiritual Assembly”, reported the Brisbane Assembly. There were some unexpected surprises in the results. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Blacktown has seven new members, the Gold Coast Assembly has five new members and the Brisbane Assembly two new members.

Reflecting on the historic local election, Manouchehr Foroughi from the outgoing Blacktown Assembly observed that the Universal House of Justice has given local communities a gift that has helped progress the Bahá’í Administration in Australia.



Developing Communities in Apartment Blocks

Australia's cities have many streets like this with medium-rise apartment buildings. The community in Westmead are exploring how groups of families in apartment blocks can work together to support their participation in core activities.

Apartment living is increasingly a way of life in Australia's cities. One in ten Australians were in an apartment on the night of the 2016 Australian Census according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Recognising this, Bahá'ís around the country have been learning how the process of neighbourhood development can develop in this setting.

In April 2021, the core team in Westmead, Sydney wanted to learn more about community development on a small pocket of a neighbourhood and how family groups could support each other. Westmead is in the midst of the western suburbs of Sydney and has many medium-rise apartment blocks. After identifying a small group of streets, three apartment blocks were identified to focus on. Each apartment building was analysed to identify some people who could become initiators of a grouping of families in their apartment block or on their street. The initiators had generally participated in the institute process or another core activity and the core team already had a strong relationship with their families.

Through a series of conversations during home visits, the team and initiator discussed the role of the family in a community, the importance of educating children and how the initiator and their family could bring families together to help each other participate in the core activities.

In one grouping, all the families in the initiator's apartment building attended the first meeting. The gathering included prayers, cultural dances and

games. A junior youth encouraged everyone to speak about aspects of the community that they liked and ways in which people would like to serve to improve it. The spirit of the gathering was joyous, encouraging and lively, and the families are eager to come together again soon and speak about the education of children at a subsequent gathering. A children's class was formed with the children in this grouping in one of the apartments in the building. A child who had not been able to attend classes previously due to a busy schedule was now able to attend as the class was so close to their home.

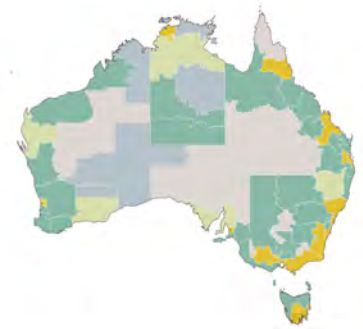
Since this time, the team is supporting the neighbourhood development process in five apartment buildings. It is now connected to 54 families and working to involve 34 of those families in regular devotional gatherings. The friends are learning how to articulate why groups of families should come together and what implications this has for their family and for the community by drawing on Book 2 in these conversations.

The team has identified some things they have learned from this work. Aside from identifying a family who are willing to host activities, families who have children and junior youth already involved in activities are more likely to become involved. It is also helpful to have an initiator who already has connections with neighbours irrespective of whether the neighbours are involved with core activities.



Use the QR code to open a link to Bahá'í Books Australia (www.cli.re/Cluster-Explainers) to download a map of the new cluster boundaries in Australia and brief 'explainers' of concepts relating to clusters.

Download New Cluster Map and Explainers



The team behind *The Australian Bahá'í* magazine has prepared a free downloadable booklet with a map of the new cluster boundaries in Australia together with 'explainers' that illustrate concepts such as what are clusters and their milestones, the role of cluster agencies, and more.

The exciting messages from the Universal House of Justice that launched the Nine Year Plan focus on the development of clusters worldwide. The Cluster Map and Explainers is a handy reference that can help readers better grasp the significance of these messages and how the Bahá'ís will release the "society-building power" of the Faith.

Use this free PDF to become up-to-speed with the terms used when talking about clusters and look up the names of Australia's clusters on the map. Perhaps you can find a cluster on the map that you could pioneer to.

The National Spiritual Assembly is eager to hear from anyone who wants to pioneer. Email the National Office at secretariat@bahai.org.au if you want to pioneer.



Volunteers from Gold Coast helped with the cleanup in Lismore. L to R: Elise Afshari, Khian Abedian, Ania Salehirad, (unidentified Lismore local), Stuart McPhee (Lismore local), Pharan Akhtarkhavari, Ramin Rowhani (Lismore business owner), Nathan Grimmond, Farzaneh Fordham, Behzad Beyzaee, Ashkan Tai, Rama Abbassian, Soroush Afshari, Elham Afshari, Zoe Hooshmand, Joel Price. Out of frame: Helen Mackie, Warwick Fordham, Sam Nozuhur.

The NSW Floods: One Community Helps Another

Northern NSW was badly affected by floods, not once, but twice earlier this year. The Bahá'ís of this region share the story of the suffering of the town of Lismore, but also highlight the tremendous efforts of local residents to help each other as well as the welcome assistance from the Gold Coast Bahá'í community.

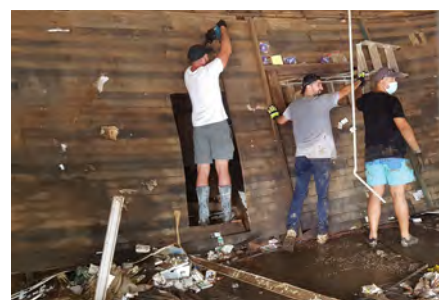
The terrible floods in many regions of eastern New South Wales in March this year destroyed many homes and businesses and also claimed the lives of some people. Especially hard-hit was Lismore; a special town in Australian Bahá'í history because it is the place of Australia's first ever Bahá'í declaration. Oswald Whitaker first heard of the Faith in 1922 there, when he debated with John Henry Hyde Dunn, who had travelled there as a salesman and travel teacher. He asked Hyde to define love, and when Oswald was satisfied with his answer, he decided to borrow some Bahá'í books from Hyde. Oswald read them all in one night and returned them the next day convinced that they contained the truth.

One hundred years later, the first flood of 2022 occurred in Lismore. Joel Price of the Bahá'í Gold Coast community recounted the community consultation at their local Nineteen Day Feast for the Bahá'í month of 'Alá'. "The devastation caused by the floods was certainly in our hearts and minds, so during the Consultation portion of

the Feast we consulted on offering immediate hands-on help, which turned quickly into action as a large group of Bahá'ís in our community organised to drive down a few days later to help in any way we could".

Ramin Rowhani was one of the Bahá'ís who they were told needed immediate help as his computer business in one of the main CBD streets of Lismore was completely submerged in the flood. Ramin told us the sequence of events after the floodwaters subsided.

"On the first clean-up day there were eight of us, friends and local Baha'is working for half a day. However there was still a lot left to be done. That's when one of the friends mentioned that Bahá'ís of the Gold Coast had offered to help. So I asked if four or five people could come the next day to help. To my amazement, the next day about fifteen friends from the Gold Coast Bahá'í community turned up. They actually arrived at the shop before I did. So when I arrived I found them already busy cleaning up. There were other Lismore locals there too and it took 20



of us about 6 hours to finish the job".

The Gold Coast Bahá'ís joined teams of people who were helping anyone they could in Lismore. There was a great sense of community service in town. Ramin continued, "I had strangers coming to me volunteering to help with the clean up or friends who I had not heard of for a while turning up to help. Clean up was happening all over the Lismore area and everyone needed a hand. Those present were amazed by the number of people who'd come from Gold Coast to help me with my shop. It definitely made an impression on those who witnessed it".

If ye meet the abased or the down-trodden, turn not away disdainfully from them, for the King of Glory ever watcheth over them and surroundeth them with such tenderness as none can fathom...

Bahá'u'lláh

Kindness and Service to Others After Floods

I welcome the sound of rain on my tin roof in summer as it often heralds a storm to break the humidity of a hot day. Not this year, 2022. The rain now has become an alarming signal which might just herald more flooding. Lismore has had two devastating flood events in just four weeks. Filthy, furious, fast flowing water covering houses, sweeping away cars and showing nature in its fury. Some residents even lost their lives, one of whom was the longest serving presenter at the radio station from where my programme, 'The Bahá'í Hour', broadcasts early every Sunday morning.

Power and internet crashed overnight, deluged houses and businesses lost most of their stock and Lismore resounded to the wails of sirens and helicopters searching out the desperate clinging to the roofs of their houses. Two Bahá'ís in the centre of the CBD were badly affected, and two more had to swim for their lives as the waters rose around them. It was five days before I heard of this news because of the lack of media. I first heard some news when a neighbour organised to charge up my phone. Another neighbour took in some of the food from my fridge into the one in his caravan. We live on a hill but the water was coursing at the bottom of the road cutting off access. The flooding was widespread and deep over the highways. The Australian Defence Force was brought in eventually, and helicopters started to land and take off on the golf course near my home.

On the fifth day after the storms, a Bahá'í living in a country area and with access to a four wheel drive brought over some petrol and a generator which seemed like a miracle at the time. Other friends loaned candles and lamps. While this all sounds romantic, the aftermath proved otherwise. Lismore looks like a war zone with thousands of homeless and winter fast approaching. Not once, but twice has this region been hit by severe storms and flooding in a very short time.

Angels appeared on the streets in plenty once the water started to recede, not least the young and not so young Bahá'ís from the Gold Coast who sent supplies of food, clothes, bedding and other essentials to our area, not to mention the cleaning materials. Sleeves were rolled up and the cleaning commenced. It was such a comfort to receive that support. So many impressive acts of



Eighty-five year old Lismore Bahá'í Rosie Bennett shares the suffering of the town during the floods, but also highlights the acts of kindness and service to others by so many people in the aftermath of the devastation.

kindness, mercy and generosity — virtues that will have to be ongoing with this amount of devastation. Yes, I was born into a war zone, so I can declare that the aftermath of our crises were similar. PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) can now be joined by another acronym — PFSD — Post-Flood Stress Disorder. There is not a single person in this area who was not affected by these floods.

We should not be surprised at all of the above — it is rather an under-stated report. Our Writings have shown that crisis and victory are our practical and spiritual companions. Thanks be to all the Bahá'ís of the Gold Coast as well as others who offered their time, financial support and prayers to us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Don't forget us. We need your love and prayers.



Rosie Bennett wrote, "This was the cheery ADF coming to evacuate me from my home although I did not want to be evacuated during the second flood as I live on a hill. They were so courteous and sweet to this old lady".

The National Assembly has been heartened to see the many friends who have, individually and in groups coordinated by their Local Assembly, arisen to serve their communities and neighbouring ones during this crisis. Working alongside their fellow citizens, these dedicated souls have responded to the needs of the hour, throwing themselves into the work of bringing practical assistance to those in need of help. Their efforts encapsulate the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance between the individual, the local community and the institutions called for by the Universal House of Justice in its 30 December 2021 message.

As we grapple with the challenges we face at home, and grieve at those we see taking place across the globe, let us remain a source of that "depleted resource" of hope. Let us continue to find creative ways to provide meaningful service to our neighbours and those further afield, drawing on the skills of every devoted believer. In so doing, our endeavours will bring us closer to our goal of building vibrant, outward-looking communities, capable of releasing the society-building power inherent in our Faith.

National Spiritual Assembly to the Baha'is of Australia, 15/3/2022



Dimitri's Escape from the Floods

*Everyone in the flooded areas of northern New South Wales has a story to tell. Lismore Bahá'í **Dimitri Tishler** recounts his escape from his flooded home and how he was helped time and again by Lismore residents.*

The night before the flood, the SES came and knocked on our door, saying that the flood wouldn't happen until the next day. But I was woken just past midnight by my housemate Stephen. He said that the flood had come and was one metre up the side of the house. We talked about what to do and I went down the front stairs and decided against going into the water to leave.

As the water continued to come up fast, Stephen thought that the best way to save some of his possessions was to put them in a spare fridge that was stored under the house, so we went downstairs and tried to take the fridge upstairs, but we found it too heavy and slippery to bring up the internal staircase. Stephen said that maybe the flood water would float the fridge up to the second storey, so we waited for the fridge to come up to our level.

Eventually, the water came up to our level and all the furniture began to float inside the house. The fridge was by now at our level and we began to pack our things into it and float it to the front of the house. Once the water was waist-high we were able to float the fridge over the railing. We decided to go to the next-door neighbour's house, since the neighbour's house was higher up than ours and we could then wait out the flood which was still rising.

I found a polystyrene container and decided to use it to float my backpack

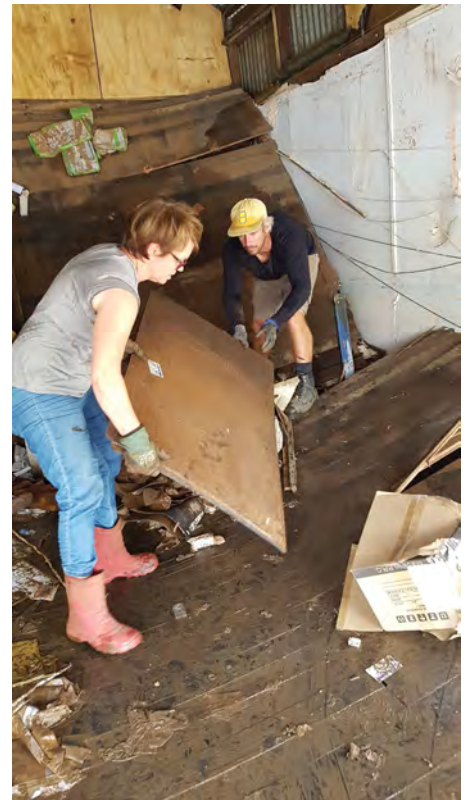
with my computer inside, over to the neighbour's house. I then swam over and put the backpack onto their verandah and swam back to get the fridge. Stephen and I then swam with the fridge between us. Our first attempt didn't work as we got stuck in treetops and bushes, so we swam back and started again. This time we went around the trees and managed to get to the neighbour's place. We then waited there for three to four hours to be rescued.

While we waited at our neighbour's house we held onto the fridge as the water rose fast. I had called the police and SES throughout the whole flood but they never came.

Eventually at around 6:30 or 7:00am, a private citizen came with a boat and rescued us, as well as an older lady with a dog. We managed to empty all Stephen's belongings and my backpack into the boat.

We came to the evacuation centre at Lismore Showgrounds where others had also been evacuated. We thought at that stage that we would be safe, but eventually, the water level began to rise up and inundate the showground, so we then scrambled up a hill. None of us knew where we were going. The Tucato family who live in the hills of North Lismore found us and took us back to their house along with 12 other people. Others went to the evacuation centres up in the hills of Dunoon.

It is important to note that the



whole community pulled together to save everyone affected by the floods, from those in boats to those providing accommodation.

After about four to six days, once the water had subsided, we all went back to the devastation of our wrecked houses and began the clean up. When we came back to see the house, the fridge had floated back to our place and lodged itself on our roof. At this point, the Lismore and Gold Coast Bahá'í communities all came to the flood-affected areas to help clean up. Also, many household goods and clothing were donated.

We seemed doomed at our place, at our house, in our city, longing for a refuge. But every place where we reached safety or were helped/rescued by others was indeed blessed by God. I was struck by the words of Bahá'u'lláh: *Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified.*

Love ye all religions and all races with a love that is true and sincere and show that love through deeds and not through the tongue...

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Sharing Light of Bahá'u'lláh in the Torres Strait and Beyond

The Universal House of Justice was saddened to learn of the passing of Janelle Gebadi, faithful follower of Bahá'u'lláh and one of the first Torres Strait Islander believers. May the memory of her devoted services, including as a teacher of the Cause of God, be an enduring source of inspiration to all those who knew her. Kindly convey the heartfelt sympathy of the House of Justice to her family members and other loved ones for the loss they have suffered and assure them of its supplications in the Holy Shrines for the progress of her illumined soul in the heavenly kingdom. Prayers will also be offered for the consolation of their hearts at this time of parting.

The Universal House of Justice Department of the Secretariat to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia, 20th October 2021

Janelle Dana Gebadi, also known as Auntie Galai, has been a stalwart servant of God since she declared in the late 1980s. Janelle was such a beautiful and good-natured person, both inside and out. Last year she shared her story about declaring her faith in Bahá'u'lláh.

One twilight evening she was walking home from the hospital after visiting her baby daughter, who was an inpatient at the Thursday Island Hospital. She was approached by a car which pulled up next to her. The driver offered her a lift. Janelle refused politely, but the driver kept insisting she'd give her a lift. "I said, God forgive me for jumping in a car with a stranger", said Janelle. The stranger was a beautiful personage, Auntie Mona. Auntie Mona and Uncle John Spottiswoode were pioneering on Thursday Island with their families.

Auntie Mona invited Janelle to a sewing class. Auntie Mona asked everyone to say a prayer at the start of the class. There was someone from Kuala Lumpur who said a prayer from the Qur'án and others said prayers.

Auntie Galai recalled the moment she first read a prayer from Bahá'u'lláh

at that sewing class. "There was a white prayer book lying in front of me". She paused with emotion, remembering the time. "I opened a page. It was 'Create in me a pure heart' ... It got to my heart... I couldn't hold it, my body was trembling when I said the prayer, 'Create in me a pure heart O my God and renew a tranquil conscience within me'. I can feel like electrifying through my body... It make me change my mind, something about this prayer I must look into". That moment sent her on a journey to learn about the Faith, and she declared a few years later at a summer school held on the Atherton Tablelands.

Janelle was the second oldest of ten siblings. Her father was from the top western Torres Strait Island called Saibai Island. He married a beautiful lady from Erub (Dalney Island) which is located on the far eastern islands of Torres Strait. Janelle was raised as an Anglican on Thursday Island. After she became a Bahá'í on the Tablelands she returned to Thursday Island. A little while later her sister, Ina, told her that she had been learning about the Bahá'í Faith from Alice Fitzgerald while living in Cairns. Ina declared after Auntie Galai.

Janelle was also a woman of many beautiful words that brings shivers to you, in the most beautiful way. Janelle taught the Faith to many friends and families in the Torres Strait and beyond south. The Bahá'í Centre on Thursday Island was a heart for Janelle. She always greeted everyone with her beautiful smile. She found every opportunity to teach everyone about unity and to utilise our Centre, even during work times, especially on her break from the radio station. She was nominated to do opening



Family members at Auntie Galai's grave site with Auntie Mona Spottiswoode, who taught her the Faith on Thursday Island in the 1980s.

and closing prayers at most of her work meetings.

Auntie Galai taught the Faith on the local radio station 4MW 1260AM which is listened to by most people in the Torres Strait. She started volunteering with another member of the Faith. A year after the programme started *The Bahá'í World News Service* reported that the Bahá'í radio programme was called "Baha-Bi-Buiya", which means "Light-Light-Light" in Arabic and the two main dialects of the Torres Strait. It used a talkback radio format and functioned as an online study circle. Aside from the Bahá'í programme, Auntie Galai worked as a presenter on the radio for over twenty years.

Auntie Galai's funeral was a significant event on Thursday Island and has helped the Islanders gain greater understanding of the Faith. The funeral took place at the Bahá'í Centre which is on the main street of Thursday Island. The venue was not big enough for the number of mourners with many listening to the funeral on the street. People came from Townsville, Cairns and the northern Cape York areas. Jane Bolton-Bound was at the funeral and said, "Everyone congregated around her grave. Every afternoon they would go up and say prayers... and when they came back down there was consultation".

The funeral was an eye-opener and a learning process for those on the Island. They appreciated the profound but short funeral service and the attitude of the Bahá'ís towards death and mourning. Life must go on. You must move on. You can't be sitting back and feeling sorry. You have got a lot of things to do, you have work to do because that's your purpose on this earth.

—Margaret Gabey



Janelle Gebadi (left) and Ina Apuita presenting their weekly Bahá'í-inspired radio program in 2005. © Bahá'í World News Service news.bahai.org/story/406/

Devoted Assistant to Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone

Kaye Waterman, the eldest daughter of Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone and Madge Featherstone, passed away on 16th December 2021 at the age of 82.

Kaye met her future husband, Graham Waterman, in England following the Bahá'í World Congress in 1963. Kaye attended a Nineteen Day Feast immediately following the Congress and her Bahá'í friend from Perth, Otlalie Stempel, invited her to meet Graham during the social portion of the Feast. They just clicked! A month later they were married. Unfortunately her parents were unable to remain in London for the wedding as Mr Featherstone already had a planned itinerary ahead. But her mother was available to help choose a wedding dress before they left. It was a most beautiful wedding with Hand of the Cause Hasan Balyuzi officiating the wedding. They were very blessed.

The newlyweds returned to India where Graham worked and spent a few years there before moving to Adelaide. There, Graham assisted Mr Featherstone in his engineering business before he and Kaye pioneered to Rockhampton, where they helped to form an Assembly. A few years later when Mr Featherstone retired and sold his business, Mr and Mrs Featherstone also moved to Rockhampton.

Kaye had three sisters and one brother; Margaret, Joan, Mariette and Geoffrey. She was loved by all, warm and caring. As a child Kaye would wake up early to practise the piano, taking turns with her sisters before breakfast. She loved to play the piano and took much comfort from it. She also taught music for a few years. She was always ready to lend a helping hand and was also fastidious. Things had to be done right. They had to be the best. They had to be accurate. That quality of perfection ran through her life.

Kaye and Graham had two boys, Brett and Christopher, and later three grandchildren. She and Graham actively served the Rockhampton Bahá'í Community and Kaye was Secretary of the Local Assembly for many years.

Kaye is mostly remembered for the loving and devoted care and attention

she and husband Graham gave to her parents. Mr and Mrs Featherstone relied on them both when they were away for months at a time travelling around the world meeting with Bahá'í communities. They took care of the mail deliveries and meticulously filed the letters in date order in a large box so that when Mr Featherstone returned he could open them in the order that they were received. They paid the bills that were due during their absence and took care to make sure the garden around the house was neat and tidy.

When Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone passed away, Kaye and Graham assisted Mrs Featherstone to pack up his office. Mr Featherstone had a mountain of very precious correspondence that needed to be preserved by the Bahá'í Archives here in Australia and at the Bahá'í World Centre. Boxes and boxes were sent off and a truck load was sent to Australian Archives at the House of Worship in Sydney. This process took years. Correspondence needed to be sorted carefully and much needed to be kept in the family as Kaye planned to write a book on the life of the Hand of the Cause and would need reference material.

Kaye and her sister Margaret were the loving daughters who cared for Mrs Featherstone after the passing of Mr Featherstone.

Joan was living in Malaysia and Mariette was in Papua New Guinea at the time.

Before her passing, Kaye only had one project in mind and that was to write the book on the life of her father. But unfortunately it didn't come easily. Years went by and she struggled, as progress was slow. She was determined even when she was frail and in an Aged Care facility. She didn't give up, but God had other plans for her. He took this beautiful soul to attend to His rose garden. Kaye remained radiant and detached to the very end and relied on her prayers to sustain her. Mariette has now taken on the task of finishing her book.

—Mariette Leong (née Featherstone)



Kaye Waterman, together with her husband Graham, helped to form the Local Spiritual Assembly of Rockhampton and assisted Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone for many years.

In Memoriam



Mrs Shoukat Abadi Ghadim
Stirling, WA

Mrs Nancy Berkeley
Moreton Bay Region, Qld

Mrs Patricia Bewick
Kalamunda, WA

Miss June Coop
Greater Dandenong, VIC

Mrs Maria Cox
Hornsby, NSW

Ms Glenyse de Gail
formerly Newcastle, NSW

Mr Naim Masoomian
formerly Kwinana, WA

Mrs Afagh Firouzmandi
Maroondah, VIC

Mr Jeffrey Foreman
Moreton Bay Region, QLD

Mr John Handley
Redland City, QLD

Mrs Gowhar Horriat
Onkaparinga, SA

Mrs Kathryn Humphries
Kiama, NSW

Mr Morteza Khatibi
Maroondah, VIC

Mrs Firouzeh Khoshkhesal
Willoughby, NSW

Mr Alborz Khosravi
The Hills Shire, NSW

Mrs Parvin Manavi
Gold Coast City, QLD

Mr Payam Masoumi Tazangi
The Hills Shire, NSW

Mrs Ruhengiz Mills
Brisbane City, QLD

Ms Fataneh Misaghi
Marion, SA

Dr Shahrokh Moghaddas
Ghahfarokhi
Newcastle, NSW

Mrs Haideh Mohebbati-Arani
North Sydney, NSW

Mr Rahmatullah Naraghi Arani
Willoughby, NSW

Ms Thelma Palmer
Central Coast, NSW

Mr Mashallah Riazaty-Keshe
Glen Eira, VIC

Mrs Barbara Rofe
Logan City, QLD

Dr Robert Ross
Marion, SA

Dr Manoochehr Samali
City Of Parramatta, NSW

Mrs Fakhrieh-Khanum Sanai
Gosnells, WA

Mrs Carol Saunders-Sexton
Mount Barker, SA

Mrs Negariyeh Shakibaie
South Perth, WA

Mrs Ruth Singh
Burnside, SA

Mr David Stanbridge
Dubbo Region, NSW

Dr Kayvan Walker
MacKay Region, QLD

Mrs Tahireh Yarmohammadi
Cumberland, NSW

Humble Servant of Bahá'u'lláh in Three Countries

Dr Manoochehr Samali winged his flight to the Abhá Kingdom on the 9th of March 2022 in Sydney at the age of 82. He left behind his loving wife, three children and six grandchildren who loved him dearly.

While living in Iran, Manoochehr served on many Local Spiritual Assemblies and spent his time pioneering in small towns. As a young man he worked as a medical doctor in rural and remote areas. While passing through Lahijan in northern Iran, he met his wife Nazanin. Later becoming qualified as a paediatrician, they lived in the city of Mashhad close to family and friends. A few years later they moved to Neyshabur a city in the province of Khorasan to form the Local Spiritual Assembly.

After the Iranian Revolution the family house was ransacked by the authorities and many of their belongings were taken. Manoochehr was asked to leave Neyshabur and leave behind his home and medical practice. The family was forced to move to Tehran. While in Tehran, Manoochehr had to re-establish himself and start a new medical practice and a new life.

In 1985, Manoochehr decided to leave Iran to give his children a better and safer future. In doing so he would forsake his own career and leave Iran with uncertainty about his own future, only clinging to his trust in Bahá'u'lláh.

Manoochehr and his family escaped Iran and sought refuge in Pakistan. Following discussion with the committee that looked after the Bahá'í refugees, Manoochehr and his family took refuge in Peshawar, a Pakistani city close to the border of Afghanistan. There he attended to the medical needs of the youth who left Iran without their family and also provided them with guidance and protection.

After nine months in Pakistan, Manoochehr and his family reached Sydney in December 1985, sponsored by his brother, Nosratollah Samali. Once reaching Australia, along with the difficulty of establishing his family in a new country, Manoochehr undertook over five years of study in the medical field

and with great perseverance was able to qualify as a general practitioner.

Throughout his life in Sydney he served the Faith. He helped form the Local Spiritual Assembly of Burwood in 1988, then he served on the Blacktown Local Spiritual Assembly for ten years. Later he served on the Hornsby Local Spiritual Assembly for sixteen years and also served as an assistant to the Auxiliary Board member for Protection for many years.

Manoochehr showed immense pride in his vocation, with service for humanity always at the forefront of his personal and professional life. He will be remembered by all for his determination, his humble and loving nature, and his consistent demonstration of living a life of service.



Dr Manoochehr Samali served the Faith in Iran, Pakistan and Australia.

O SON OF SPIRIT!
*Burst thy cage asunder, and even
as the phoenix of love soar into the
firmament of holiness. Renounce thyself
and, filled with the spirit of mercy, abide
in the realm of celestial sanctity.*

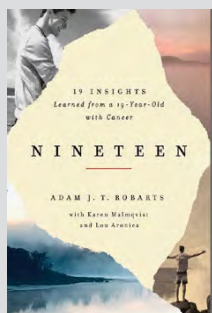
Bahá'u'lláh: Persian Hidden Words, No.38

In a condolence letter to his family, the National Spiritual Assembly said, "This devoted and stalwart servant shall be remembered for his consecrated heart, and humble and noble character. Fortified by his unwavering belief in the Cause, Manoochehr exemplified the spirit of service to humanity in his personal and professional life".

—Niloofar Ashjari

NEW LITERATURE

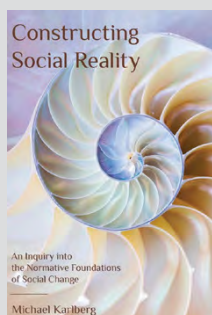
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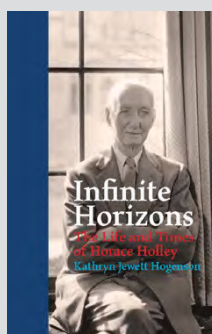
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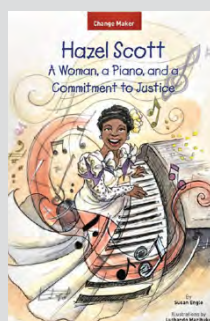
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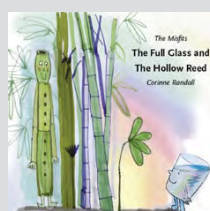
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Front Cover

Artwork by Vanessa John. Details about the artwork on page 19.

Back Cover

Community Art project by participants at the World Conference for North and Central Sydney, showcasing the diversity and vibrancy of the area.