

Advancing the Plans for the Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb in Vancouver

Friends, as the second Bicentenary rapidly approaches, we hasten to share with you guidance on this topic, as well as some basic planning materials for use in your teams as you prepare for the celebrations.

Crucial to the success of our individual efforts is a collective undertaking in teams, in order that we can support each other. We hope that teams and families will be able to study this guidance together, and help further advance the planning already underway in each of the nine feast areas to reach even greater numbers through their network of friends and families.

Guidance from Universal House of Justice and National Spiritual Assembly of Canada

A Period of Special potency

... This is a period in which to recall the extraordinary heroism of the Martyr-Herald of our Faith, Whose dramatic ministry thrust humanity into a new era of history. Though separated from our own time by two centuries, the society in which the Báb appeared resembles the present-day world for the sense of oppression and for the longing of so many to find answers to slake the soul's thirst to know. In considering how this two-hundred-year anniversary might befittingly be marked, we recognize that these festivities will have a special character of their own. Nevertheless, we anticipate a flourishing of activity no less rich and no less inclusive than that which accompanied the bicentenary just passed. It is an occasion to which every community, every household, every heart will undoubtedly look forward with eager expectation. (2018 Ridvan Message from the Universal House of Justice)

... these Holy Days should be viewed as special opportunities for the friends to reach out to the widest possible cross-section of society and to all those with whom they share a connection—whether through a family tie or common interest, an occupation or field of study, neighbourly relations or merely chance acquaintance—so that all may rejoice in the appearance, exactly two hundred years before, of One Who was to be the Bearer of a new Message for humankind. (18 May 2016 Letter from the Universal House of Justice)

The prospects for advancing this spiritual enterprise are made the more thrilling by the approach of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Like the bicentenary that preceded it, this anniversary is a moment incalculably precious. ... The measure of what might be possible in the coming two cycles is known to all from the experience of the bicentenary two years ago, and all that was learned on that occasion must be channelled into the plans for the Twin Holy Birthdays this year. As the two-hundred-year anniversary draws near, we will offer frequent supplications on your behalf in the Sacred Shrines, praying that your efforts to befittingly honour the Báb will succeed in advancing the Cause He foretold. (2019 Ridvan Message from the Universal House of Justice)

Locus at Local Level

The locus of activity for the bicentenaries is to be at the local level. The House of Justice anticipates that in countless places across the world, both rural settings and urban centres, the friends will find creative ways to honour the Twin Manifestations Whose lives and sacred missions will be recalled on Their anniversaries. There might also be an opportunity for initiatives at the national level, which could include a gathering to which dignitaries and prominent individuals who have a relationship with the Faith could be invited. But the most distinguishing feature of these bicentenaries will be a tremendous flourishing of activity by Bahá'ís and their friends in local communities. (18 May 2016, Letter from the Universal House of Justice)

Celebrations during the Entire Two Days

It should be noted that, although each anniversary is associated primarily with just one of the Manifestations, in each case the celebrations ought to encompass both of the Twin Birthdays, and events may be spread out across the full length of the two days. (18 May 2016 Letter from the Universal House of Justice)

Two-day festivals have included eloquent talks and formal programmes, sunrise devotional gatherings and pancake breakfasts, community hikes and service projects, neighbourhood visiting campaigns and intimate family dinners with friends. In all these spaces the subject of conversation was the appearance of these “two Luminaries that rose successively over the horizon of the world”. The capacity to invite and welcome, developed especially through the flourishing of devotional gatherings over the last two years, has in some communities engaged an equal number of Bahá'ís and their friends in celebrating together over the two-day period. (21 November 2016 Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada)

Dignitaries and Leaders

There might also be an opportunity for initiatives at the national level, which could include a gathering to which dignitaries and prominent individuals who have a relationship with the Faith could be invited. (18 May 2016, Letter from the Universal House of Justice)

Working with lists

... we challenge all believers to reflect on the call of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the prayer for Canada to “loose their tongues”, and think of ways they will participate in a year-long surge of invitation and welcome to the widest possible cross-section of society. A beginning might involve building a simple list of those with whom they are connected and considering how their relationship to the blessed Figures of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh can be strengthened in the next year: families, friends and acquaintances who represent concentric circles around the Bahá'í community and who can be drawn ever nearer to Him who is its Centre. (21 November 2016, Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada to the Friends gathered at the Feast of Speech)

Examples from Reflections on Growth

Reflections on Growth is a document prepared under the auspices of the International Teaching Centre for the institution of the Counsellors.

In the Malegaon cluster, **India**, two celebrations were held. One of these was in the neighbourhood of Shiwajiwadi where, during the morning, families of the children and junior youth organized devotional gatherings in their homes across six lanes. The children's class teachers created a space in front of each home to have conversations about the activities of the Bahá'í community. During the day, the children, junior youth, teachers, animators, and members of the Local Spiritual Assembly visited homes and walked along every lane explaining to the residents of the entire neighbourhood the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and the significance of the Twin Holy Days. By that evening, 450 residents gathered for the celebrations. Six celebrations were held in the Nashik cluster for the 2016 Twin Holy Days. (Reflections on Growth, June 2017)

In **Dubai**, 29 celebrations were held for the Twin Holy Days in 2016. Around 800 people attended, of which 416 were friends of the Faith. The celebrations lasted for an entire week and took place every morning and evening. Both big and small gatherings were held in the neighbourhoods. (Reflections on Growth, June 2017)

During a series of institutional meetings in **Colombia**, consultations centered on how the bicentenary celebrations can be used as special opportunities to reach out to the widest possible cross section of society. The following account illustrates how these gatherings gave an impulse to actions at the local level with the involvement of Local Spiritual Assemblies. During the institutional meeting, we reflected on what the Universal House of Justice was asking of us in the 18 May 2016 letter. We decided to make a list of all those with whom we share a connection, and among them, those with whom we could initiate a conversation about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and whom we could invite to join in the community-building activities. The exercise of making a list gave us a glimpse of how a small group—of, let's say, some 20 to 30 people—has the potential to invite a few thousand to the celebrations. After these meetings, each Regional Bahá'í Council made plans to visit many Local Assemblies in their respective regions to help more and more friends prepare for the celebrations. We are seeing that Assemblies and other agencies are, through a similar process, helping local believers to actively think about and make concrete plans to invite the largest number of people possible. (Reflections on Growth, June 2017)

Questions from the Community

Is the Local Spiritual Assembly organizing anything for the entire community or prominent persons?

As the guidance indicates, the “locus” of activity should be at the local level, and the friends are encouraged to find creative ways to celebrate. Accordingly the current plan for the locality is that all celebrations will occur at the feast, neighbourhood, and team level. In order to accomplish this we will need many more friends, including friends of the faith, involved in the planning process.

The Local Spiritual Assembly is organizing an external affairs campaign to reach out to dignitaries such as Members of Parliament and officials at the City of Vancouver, but the friends are also encouraged to consider what “prominent individuals” could refer to the local school principal, a grandmother in the community, the community centre director, or any other individual seen by the local community as a leader, all of whom might already have a relationship with someone in the Faith. Friends are encouraged to invite these contacts to their Holy Day celebrations, and to think about what types of activities might further increase the process of “connecting hearts with Baha’u’llah”.

What are the details for the film from House of Justice?

Dawn of the Light, a film commissioned by the House of Justice for this special occasion, has now been released and is available at <https://bicentenary.bahai.org/the-bab/>. It can be viewed online or downloaded. The National Spiritual Assembly has also created a mirror website in Canada, which will be available shortly, which may allow for faster download times and streaming. In addition, the National Spiritual Assembly has arranged for the production of a limited number of DVDs in French and in English, as well as USB flash drives that have the film in both low and high resolution formats in English, French, and Persian.

Are there funds available for venue and other material resources?

In anticipation of the surge of activity around this period of special potency, the Spiritual Assembly has set aside sufficient funds to support the holy day activities being planned. The friends are encouraged not to let lack of funds be a barrier to their planning, while also keeping the treasurer apprised of any material needs of the community. At the same time, we should remember the precious resource the life-blood of the Faith represents to the growing community across our cluster, region and country, and not plan extravagant occasions that might distract from a spiritually potent occasion.

There is a form to help estimate the cost of an activity at the Bicentenary Resource Page on the Assembly’s website:

<https://vancouverbahai.org/bicentenary-of-the-birth-of-the-bab/>

Friends should feel comfortable to contact the Assembly's Treasurer, Foad Shodjai, 778-991-9919, treasury@vancouverbahai.org, for any questions or consultation on managing expenses.

Would it be appropriate to sell tickets?

Experience has shown that selling tickets can create certain conditions which might lead to division or exclusion. Fitting the uplifting and reverant atmosphere encouraged by the House of Justice, friends are encouraged to consider invitations rather than tickets. Logistically, this demonstrates the importance of working with lists and knowing how many people might attend a given event amongst the team planning the event. If friends are concerned about the funds being needed, they are encouraged to consult with the treasurer after reviewing the above answers.

What should the program of the events be?

As described above in the guidance, the friends are encouraged to plan a diverse array of creative programs that will connect hearts with Baha'u'llah. They could range from breakfast devotionals to formal music evenings, from hikes to intimate family dinners, and anything in between. We should remember that the program should be uplifting and reverent. As described in the 21 November 2016 Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, in all these spaces the subject of conversation will be the appearance of these "two Luminaries that rose successively over the horizon of the world".