

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

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To all Local Spiritual Assemblies

Dearest Bahá'í Friends,

Bahá'í communities across the United States are engaged as never before in efforts to advance the process of entry by troops. Through these resolute efforts, we are learning how to use our assets and resources most effectively to further systematic growth of the Faith and to build vibrant Bahá'í communities. The most precious and telling attribute any organized group of Bahá'ís possesses is the vitality of its community life, for the world will increasingly measure our success as a religious community by the vibrancy and joy it reflects. The most visible physical asset a community can have is a Bahá'í Center. It is thus timely to take a fresh look at how Bahá'í Centers can enhance the vitality of Bahá'í community life and better support the process of growth.

As we prosecute the Five Year Plan, Bahá'í communities and the Spiritual Assemblies that serve them are responsible for aligning their resources in support of the core activities of the Plan. A Bahá'í Center is obviously one such resource. Experience has shown that it is the friends' focus on the core activities that determines the extent to which a Center furthers the aim of entry by troops and promotes growth in a community. Therefore, before taking action to acquire, expand, or renovate a Bahá'í Center, Assemblies need to give careful consideration to the question of whether such action would support or detract from their communities' core activities and pursuit of the other elements of the Plan. Continuous fundraising, for example, to gather the financial resources to fund the purchase or renovation of a Bahá'í Center could become a major distraction from the friends' efforts to prosecute the Plan. Similarly, prolonged debates about location, design, and usage can be detrimental.

In most situations, communities should, before purchase, first consider leasing a property for a Bahá'í Center. Experience has shown that facilities of grandiose or extravagant proportions rarely meet the needs of an expanding community committed to decentralization and growth at the grass roots. Rather than permanent fixtures, the best facilities for local Bahá'í purposes at the present time are those that allow for maximum flexibility in their use and in the financial arrangements made to secure them. Moreover, Bahá'í communities committed to growth would do well to anticipate the time when most activities will take place at the neighborhood level. Facilities purchased or rented for Bahá'í purposes can also serve a fresh purpose by striving for an outward-looking orientation.

Local Spiritual Assemblies should therefore carefully assess the capacity and current needs of their communities before moving forward with plans for the establishment or renovation of facilities for a Bahá'í Center. To foster unity of

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thought and vision, their consultations ought to include opportunities for members of the community and the cluster, their assigned Auxiliary Board members, and members of their cluster agencies to share insights and offer opinions. While Auxiliary Board members do not determine whether or not a community acquires a Bahá'í Center, their counsel should be sought early on and welcomed as such a prospect is considered. Although a Bahá'í Center can serve the needs of a cluster, the decision as to whether and how to proceed with its rental or purchase must be made solely by the Local Spiritual Assembly in whose jurisdiction the facility is located. This Spiritual Assembly must be the sole owner or lessee of the facility and has the ultimate responsibility for its operation and maintenance.

As we look to the future, we can anticipate that Bahá'í Centers, fulfilling the various needs of a more diverse community with an outward-looking orientation, will be foremost among the physical assets assisting to advance the process of entry by troops. Strategies to maintain unity and to make realistic appraisals of time, effort, and money with regard to such facilities are included in the *Bahá'í Center Assistance* manual and website at www.bahaicenterassistance.org. We trust that these guidelines will be helpful as individuals, communities, and Bahá'í institutions continue to embrace the framework for growth set by the Universal House of Justice.

Our prayers for your great success in the all-important work of the Five Year Plan are unceasing.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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Secretary-General

cc: Counselors Farzin Aghdasi, Eugene S. Andrews, Stephen Birkland,
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Regional Bahá'í Councils