

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Correction to Ridván message

The Universal House of Justice has recently written to correct the Ridván Message issued in April 2000.

The House of Justice wrote to a believer in this country on 6th September:

"The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to thank you for your letter of 1 July 2000 in which you drew its attention to the section on 'First Public Mentions of the Bahá'í Faith' on the UK Bahá'í Heritage Site, based on two articles by Dr Moojan Momen and Mr Derek Cockshut respectively. It is quite clear, as you indicate, that Shoghi Effendi's words on page 256 of "God Passes By" refer to the first public reference to Bahá'u'lláh in the United States, and that it was certainly antedated by the statements made by Professor E G Browne in Britain. The text of the Ridván message therefore needs correction ...

"The House of Justice has, therefore, decided to send a notice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, requesting them to change West" to 'Western Hemisphere' in the Ridván message."

Therefore, please change the text of your Ridván message, paragraph 20 to read:

"Humanity's awakening to the spiritual dimensions of the changes occurring in the world have a special significance for Bahá'ís. The interfaith dialogue has intensified. During the Four Year Plan it increasingly involved the Faith as a recognized participant. The Parliament of the World's Religions held in Cape Town last December brought together some 6,000 attendees, among whom was a strong Bahá'í delegation. Bahá'ís served on both the South African and International Boards of Directors that planned the event. For Bahá'ís, interest in the occasion arose particularly from the fact that the first mention of the Name of Bahá'u'lláh at a public gathering in the Western Hemisphere had occurred at the Parliament held in Chicago in 1893 ..."

Thanks to the teachers

To the teachers of the Bahá'í Community Schools and Children's Classes throughout the UK

Dear friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly wishes to express its sincere gratitude for your selfless and sacrificial efforts in the field of children's education.

Your dedication and devotion is deeply appreciated by the National Assembly and we are sure, by the entirety of the UK Bahá'í community.

We are confident that friends everywhere will do all in their power to support you in carrying out your valuable tasks.

Loving Bahá'í greetings, National Spiritual Assembly

A spirit of friendliness and fellowship - the Inter Faith Network for the UK

In the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords on 3rd January this year, the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport referred to the "nine major religions" of the UK. The "nine" are, of course the nine recognised faith

communities represented on the executive committee of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFNET). The "nine" includes the Bahá'í community.

Founded in 1987 largely on the initiative of its present Director, Brian Pearce OBE, the Network has become an important umbrella body for all its members, and particularly for the nine faith communities. The UK, says IFNET, has become one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world; this diversity offers rich opportunities but it can also lead to conflict. IFNET offers "a trusted neutral, non-denominational forum for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern..."

The Network also encourages "inclusive patterns of consultation and practice in the public sector and raises awareness of the importance of religious identity among policy makers and service providers". The Network and its member bodies now work with Government departments and other organisations on a wide range of issues. This has been one of the most important benefits of IFNET membership for the National Spiritual Assembly and the UK Bahá'í community, and has contributed greatly to our emergence from obscurity and our increasing engagement in public life. The Bahá'í presence in the Millennium Dome's Faith Zone, Bahá'í participation in the multi-faith consultations on hospital chaplaincy, Bahá'í contributions to Government thinking on religious discrimination and to the inter-faith coalition which is encouraging the Government to ratify the International Criminal Court treaty earlier rather than later, these are some of the current external affairs projects that have been enabled by our membership of IFNET.

The Universal House of Justice commented in this year's Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the world on this important development:

"The interfaith dialogue has intensified. During the Four Year Plan it increasingly involved the Faith as a recognised participant... In the United Kingdom, the Faith was placed in the public arena when Bahá'í representatives joined members of eight other major religions for an interfaith celebration of the new millennium in the Royal Gallery of Westminster Palace, where, in the presence of Royalty, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other distinguished persons, reference was made to the gathering of the 'nine major religions of the United Kingdom.'..."

The National Spiritual Assembly greatly values its membership of IFNET and IFNET's work; it supports IFNET's financial needs through its annual subscription and has pledged a modest annual donation to the Network for the next three years.

Building friendly relationships between the religions will undoubtedly grow even more in importance, as the House of Justice made clear in the Ridván message:

"The frequency and wide embrace of interfaith gatherings represent a new phenomenon in the relations among the religions. It is apparent that the various religious communities are striving to achieve the spirit of friendliness and fellowship among themselves that Bahá'u'lláh urged His followers to show towards the followers of other religions."

Bahá'í Council election procedure

Those of you serving on Local Assemblies will by now have received the election call and ballots for the election of the Bahá'í Councils.

As this is the first time such a huge ballot has been undertaken and so many of you are voting in a national election for the very first time, it is no wonder that some questions have arisen.

Some friends have called the National Assembly's offices to ask whether they can have a list of the believers in their part of the country. Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide such lists. With nearly 6000 believers in the country and nearly 200 Local Assemblies, you can understand that our human and financial resources simply do not permit this! We are sure you will understand this decision.

Other friends wonder whether they need to fill in the section of the ballot which asks for the community name. It is not necessary to fill in this section. It is used primarily to distinguish people who have the same name or to identify a person should the name be misspelt. If you are able to supply the name of the community, please do

so. If not, please leave the space blank.

It is so exciting to be taking part in this historic event, a further step in the development and maturity of the United Kingdom Bahá'í Community. We pray that every Local Assembly member will take this opportunity to vote in this first ever election of the Bahá'í Councils.

Prayers for the National Fund

In response to the recent appeal for the National Fund, several of the friends have suggested that the National Spiritual Assembly set aside a special day of prayer for the Fund.

At its meeting at the beginning of October the National Spiritual Assembly decided to ask that you say special prayers for the National Fund on the Day of the Covenant, 26th November, a holy day on which we commemorate the Covenant and the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and we recall our responsibilities towards that Covenant, including our need to support the Fund.

Bahá'í Information Office Third Floor, Bridge House, 97-101 High Street, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1DP Tel: 01732 369694, Fax: 01732 369733 e-mail: <mailto:bio@bahai.org.uk>

What BIO is not...

The Bahá'í Information Office (UK) receives a number of enquiries and requests for information which fall outside its remit. These include people looking for individuals, specific local secretaries, telling us about changes of address etc.

We would like to remind the Friends that these queries should in fact go to the National Office (27 Rutland Gate), e-mail: <mailto:registrations@bahai.org.uk> Tel: 020 7584 2566. If they come to BIO they have to be forwarded, with resultant delay, increased staff work and the possibility of loss.

BIO is the service body for press and public information for the Bahá'í community, providing resource materials, education, suggestions, guidance and training to Spiritual Assemblies, groups, individuals, and other administrative bodies so that they can carry out this work in their own areas. It also pursues a number of specific tasks supplying information to the public.

The first Irish Bahá'ís

A new page has been created for the UK Bahá'í Heritage Website which gives information about early Irish and Ireland-related Bahá'ís. This starts with Dr Frederick D'Evelyn, the Belfast-born physician who was the first person of Irish birth to become a Bahá'í and the centenary of whose declaration occurs next year. Others include Lady Blomfield, and Joan Waring, who was as far as is known the first native believer; the first Irish person to become a Bahá'í in Ireland.

Go to: <http://www.iol.ie/~isp/heritage/> for the site or <http://www.iol.ie/~isp/heritage/irish.htm> for that specific page.

Those who do not have Web access can obtain a copy from the Bahá'í Information Office, address above (SAE appreciated).

Bahá'í World statistics on BIO Webpace

The latest set of Bahá'í World statistics (July 2000 update), received from the World Centre, has been placed in the Bahá'í Information Office Webpace and can be visited at: <http://www.iol.ie/~isp/statistics/> (take a look and then backtrack into the main Webpace for all sorts of interesting things).

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Eagle on its way to the Guardian's Resting Place

We have recently received an update from Mr Fariborz Sahba about progress with the restoration of the eagle at the Guardian's Resting Place. We are happy to share the following with you.

The eagle has been enlarged and cast in bronze. A method of installation of the eagle to the globe has been developed which will enable it to be removed and re-installed for any future maintenance. It is likely that the eagle will be ready for installation by the middle of November.

Progress is being made with a new security system to protect the Guardian's Resting Place.

New compilation available electronically

The new compilation from the Universal House of Justice, "The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting", is available electronically in the following ways:

It has been published on the National Spiritual Assembly's Website and can be visited at:

<http://www.bahai.org.uk/writings>

A formatted e-copy (PDF file - requires Adobe Acrobat Reader) is available on request from the National Assembly by sending an e-mail to: <mailto:resources@bahai.org.uk>

Prayers at the office

Our office staff members, who do so much to keep the administrative order running smoothly in this country, have weekly prayers every Monday morning at 10am until 10.15am at both 27 Rutland Gate and at Bridge House, Tonbridge. We would greatly appreciate it if you would not telephone either office during this brief period except in emergencies so that our hard-working colleagues may begin their week with the spiritual food Bahá'u'lláh has provided.

Child Protection guidelines

The National Spiritual Assembly has guidelines for the protection of children and young people which must be followed for residential events, Bahá'í community schools, etc.

Copies are available on request from the National Spiritual Assembly, at 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD.

It is extremely important that organisers of Bahá'í events which include childrens' classes make themselves familiar with these guidelines and ensure they are followed.

Browse Bahá'í Web sites ...

<http://www.bahai.org>

<http://www.library.bahai.org>

<http://www.bahaindex.com>

<http://www.onecountry.org>

Mixed sex accommodation

From time to time Local Assemblies and individual Bahá'ís ask the National Assembly what the policy is on people of opposite sexes sharing accommodation. The National Spiritual Assembly would like to share with you recent guidance from the Universal House of Justice on this subject, which underscores the National Assembly's own policy.

The Universal House of Justice writes:

"With respect to Bahá'ís living in the same residence with a person of the opposite sex, such an arrangement would by no means be automatically considered unacceptable. It is not uncommon, for example, for a person to let out bed-sitting rooms in his or her house to students, vacationers, or others. Similarly, a man or woman may employ a housekeeper or servant of the other sex. What is considered proper in such arrangements varies from country to country. The laws and principles of our Faith, on the other hand, are meant to apply across all cultures, and what Bahá'ís would consider immoral is people who are not married living together as husband and wife, and indulging in sexual relations.

Beyond this, however, even if the relationship between a Bahá'í man and woman is entirely innocent, it is vitally important that they should not live together in a way that would give the wrong impression. If there is any doubt about the perceived morality of a particular situation they should unhesitatingly avoid it and seek alternative arrangements in order to preserve the good name of the Faith. In following the standards of the Faith, the friends must be not only righteous, but also wise. Naivety can do great harm, especially in the present unstable condition of social morals in the world at large."

The National Spiritual Assembly's policy is:

"With regard to mixed sex accommodation, in general, the National Spiritual Assembly understands the situation of people of opposite sexes who share accommodation for financial or other practical reasons. In these somewhat dangerous times, it is even sometimes advisable for a group of young women to share accommodation with young men as a protection against intruders and those who might threaten them, providing, of course, that they are clearly accommodated in separate bedrooms and there is no suggestion that there is a sexual relationship among them.

Each situation has to be treated on its own merits, case by case. The Local Assembly must be satisfied that there is no wrong-doing on the part of the parties or the appearance of this. If the situation is bringing the Faith into disrepute, then the Local Assembly must deal with it appropriately."