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Bahá'í Council for Scotland

Historic Meeting of Scottish Religious Leaders in Dunblane

ON THURSDAY, September 12, 2002 a historic meeting took place at Scottish Churches House in Dunblane. At the invitation of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland and the Primus of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, representatives of each of the main faith groups in Scotland gathered for a meeting to help bring more understanding between the faiths and to see what opportunities there might be for collective action. I had the honour of representing the Bahá'í Community of Scotland.

The meeting lasted for five hours in all. In the first session we all presented a symbol of our faith and talked a little about it (I brought a nine-pointed copper star which Alex Reid of Glasgow Community had made). There was a great diversity of symbols but interestingly the Buddhists, Jews and Catholics all brought prayer beads so prayer was a common theme through the session.

In the afternoon we talked about the four virtues represented on the mace in the Scottish Parliament (justice, wisdom, integrity and compassion) and what we could do collectively which would encapsulate these.

At the end of the day it was decided to issue a press release stating the fact of this gathering, that prayers were said for peace in the world and of our resolve to make this the beginning of a process for developing more understanding between all of the faith communities and to make it an annual occurrence. Although this may not seem much, given that this was the first gathering of its kind in Scotland I think the fact that there was so much obvious unity, genuine warmth and a common desire to take things forward is a great achievement. Lama Yeshe Losal from the Buddhist community offered to host the next meeting in the Holy Isle off Arran and the Scottish Interfaith Council are going to look into this one.

The sub-text of the day was to take time for everyone to get know each other better and I think that did happen very effectively. If a level of trust and understanding is built up then the potential for collective action and the impact that could have is breathtaking to consider.

The event received some coverage in the media though not as much as was hoped with a small article in The Herald, the Press and Journal and the Dundee Courier.

Although the date of the first meeting was deliberately chosen to mark the anniversary of September 11, it was felt that it would be better to choose a different date for future meetings to avoid any danger of the Islamic community being stigmatised by that choice.

Until now, interfaith activities in Scotland have developed as a result of the “interfaith enthusiasts” in each of the faiths. This meeting therefore signified a change in that it was called by faith leaders themselves. Hopefully this means that the religions are beginning to give due attention to the need, identified in the message from the Universal House of Justice, to look at:

... the implications of the overarching truth that called the movement (interfaith discourse)

into being: that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one.

(Letter of The Universal House of Justice, 2002 April: To the World's Religious Leaders, p. 6)

Allan Forsyth,
Chairman,
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Bahá'í Council for England

“In the last few months there have been two major developments which suggest that the English community is making significant strides in the Five Year Plan.”

The Bahá'í Council for England is excited to update you on the latest news from this region. In the last few months there have been two major developments which suggest that the English community is making significant strides in the Five Year Plan. Both of these spring from the first ever intensive training campaign which took place during the summer, which was co-ordinated by the Bahá'í Youth Committee for England in collaboration with the Training Institute for England.

First, the campaign enabled a group of fifty-five youth and junior youth to progress through part or all of the sequence of courses offered by the Training Institute. There are many stories of how this experience deeply affected the lives of these young believers, kindling their desire to become even more enthusiastic lovers and teachers of the Cause. Seekers enrolled into the Faith as a result of participating in this campaign. England now has a vibrant band of youth and junior youth eager to play an active part in pursuing the three core activities of the Plan: children's classes, devotional meetings and study circles, each open to all.

The impressive level of understanding of the Plan amongst the participants at the “Moment of Consciousness” Youth and Junior Youth Congress held in August is a further indication that our young believers are ready to take the lead. The Council is well aware, as doubtless are communities and Spiritual Assemblies across England, that the passion and commitment of these young souls need to be nurtured and channelled into promoting the three activities in their localities and clusters.

The other important development is the proven ability of the Training Institute for England to deliver the sequence of courses over a short period of time. Further campaigns are anticipated in the holiday periods. Running parallel with this is the ongoing multiplication of study circles and the progress of the friends through the sequence of courses. These efforts indicate that the training process is assuming its place at the heart of the English community.

The Council itself, led by Counsellor Shahriar Razavi, spent a weekend in September deepening its understanding of Part 7 of the Bahá'í Writings, which explains much of the

deepening its understanding of BOOK 7 of the KUMI materials, which explains much of the logic behind the sequence of books, the qualities and skills required for tutoring the books, and the promotion of the arts at the grassroots. We feel that this has greatly enhanced our understanding of the importance of the sequence and the vital need for as many of the friends as possible to advance through it.

With the second round of cluster reflection meetings already under way, the Council is keen for the friends to consider how effectively the three core activities are being implemented in their communities. Individual initiative remains the driving force behind the success of these activities and we are always eager to hear of such initiatives. The Council feels that individuals, communities and institutions need to reflect on four major aspects in the development of the three core activities:

- Increasing the number of these activities.
- Combining these activities so that they reinforce each other.
- Opening them to all.
- Incorporating the arts into these activities.

By giving attention to these points in our cluster meetings, Nineteen Day Feasts, Assembly meetings, group meetings and study circles, as well as during our personal moments of reflection, the Council is confident that the English community will further develop its united vision for growth. Now is also the time to experiment. For example, how can we be more creative in our study circles? What are the most effective ways of inviting those who are not Bahá'ís to devotional meetings? It is this unity of vision and diversity of initiative that will ensure the advancement of the Plan.

In December, the second institutional meeting will take place, attended by Counsellor Razavi, members of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Council, Auxiliary Board members and members of the Training Institute, to review the progress of clusters in England.

The Council will share the fruits of this consultation soon afterwards, certain that it will help us all to redouble our efforts in implementing the three core activities which are indispensable to the progress of clusters from one stage of growth to the next.

With warmest love,
The Bahá'í Council for England

Bahá'í Council for England

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Full details of the Five Year Plan, the goals and Areas of England can be found
on the Council's website, <http://www.bahai.org.uk/england/>

URGENTLY REQUIRED

Training Co-ordinator for the Training Institute for England. Full-time position.
Deadline for applications Nov 10, 2002.
For further details see: www.bahai.org.uk/england/.

