



Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
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Bahá'í Councils and Training Institutes

Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland

Eight Spiritual Assemblies in Northern Ireland reformed at Ridván. Assemblies were formed in the old districts of Belfast, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Londonderry, Newtownabbey and North Down and in the new districts of Coleraine Town and Newtownards.

We now go forwards with new exciting challenges and opportunities for all of us to play our part in the global Five Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice. The aim of this Plan is to significantly advance the process of entry by troops and this aim will continue to the end of the 1st Century of the Formative Age.

A historic meeting for future of Northern Ireland took place on Sunday 22 April in Ballymena. This meeting provided a very special opportunity to consult on the initial guidance from the House of Justice on the Five Year Plan. A number of institutions took part. Mr. Shahriar Razavi represented the Continental Board of Counsellors, together with his Auxiliary Board members, Anne O'Sullivan and Denis Coyle. Conveying greetings from the National Assembly, Dr. Iain Palin said that the establishment of Bahá'í Councils throughout the world indicates that the role of National Assemblies is changing. Members of the Northern Ireland Bahá'í Council were also present together with the membership of the Training Institute Board.

During the course of the day Counsellor Razavi shared many insights from the 9th of January letter of the Universal House of Justice, addressed to the Conference of Continental Counsellors held in Haifa. All present became increasingly aware of the great depths of meaning within this highly significant letter. It is the intention of the Council to share this historic letter widely with the friends who will, no doubt, wish to arrange opportunities for the study of its' far-reaching consequences.

All attending expressed heartfelt joy and wonderment at the coherence of vision produced by this major document which gives us all the opportunity to "align our pursuits with the will of God." [Universal House of Justice, *9th January Letter to the Counsellor's Conference*] Before leaving the Counsellor expressed his admiration that such a high level of understanding, maturity and unity of thought had been achieved during the day.

Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland

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Bahá'í Councils and Training Institutes

Bahá'í Council for England

East Anglia Spring School

For four days over the Easter holiday up to 150 Bahá'ís and their friends





gathered for the East Anglia Spring School.

Although the school has long become a standard feature of the UK Bahá'í calendar, after 18 years it had outgrown its original venue so a new, larger home was found at The Friends' School, Saffron Walden 14 miles south of Cambridge.

Children performing at the Spring School.

The other change to take place this year was in the organisation: till now the school had been organised by a gallant body of local believers. However, to serve the Bahá'í Council for England's aim of establishing schools as national, rather than local, institutions the Council asked its Residential Schools Task Force (RSTF) to assume responsibility for the school. The RSTF for its part turned to the local friends for the benefit of their wealth of experience and local knowledge in preparing for the school. However, these changes and the fact that the school had never before been fully residential resulted in a few teething problems. The organisers thank the friends for their forbearance and patience and undertake to resolve the problems for next year and should they forget to do so they have the 30 evaluation forms to remind them!

The central theme was The Ark of the Covenant, on and around which Kevin Beint, Wendi Momen, Moojan Momen, Betty Reed and Philip and Lois Hainsworth spoke during the daytime sessions. The stalwarts Betty, Philip and Lois delighted the friends with their very personal (and humorous) accounts of meeting the Guardian in Haifa. Betty brought a particular joy to the school with her band of youthful assistants, the twinkling fairy lights (or was that her eyes?) and collection of ancient rocks. Philip, we learned, is probably the longest-serving NSA member in the world.

The National Spiritual Assembly and the Council for England each addressed the main sessions through their representatives.

Afternoon workshops provided the friends with a choice of parenting, health & healing, music, the Funds and creative arts while the night owls gathered to play music and discuss lots of things (the writer never made it to these sessions - just heard rumours).


While the grown-ups were kept occupied in the hall, the real work was going on in the children's classes where each day, after a group devotional, they formed into 3 age groups and coloured, sang, played, learned and created the day away.

The youth also were catered for with their own programme of talks, workshops and discussions and they arranged and hosted a tranquillity zone one evening for all those attending (apologies for the lack of detail, I never made it to their sessions).

Each evening had its own distinctive entertainment: Caribbean sunshine from the Kiskadee steel band, Valerina Clarke's presentation of her time teaching in a small, industrial Chinese town and a fund raising concert in aid of Save the Children. The concert was given by a non-

Bahá'í German choir, friends of the Northampton Bahá'ís, who stayed with us during the whole school and to warm the audience up beforehand the children and the youth each performed a small play.

The whole event was blessed by the spirit of being happy to be together and of service, no more so than in the kitchen where bands of volunteers rose to the



The choir in full voice.

challenge of washing up for 100 people 3 times a day (that was a big washing machine!). I did at least make it to these sessions, honest...

If you are now sorry that you missed the school, don't forget that there will be 2 summer schools in England this year: Sidcot and Worksop. Please see the separate notices for details.

Bahá'í Council for England

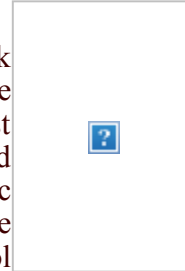
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Bahá'í Councils and Training Institutes 

Bahá'í Council for Wales

Spring School in Wales

The third annual Spring School held at Trinity College, Carmarthen, took place over the Easter weekend, drawing friends from across Wales and the UK (including Scotland and Cumbria). This was probably the most successful school to date - said by many to be the most inspiring and uplifting in the Welsh Spring School's 14-year history. The diverse artistic and other inputs of a great number of attendees into many aspects of the school were undoubtedly a great contributory factor. The School Committee steered the ship successfully and all in attendance stood behind them in an extremely supportive and loving manner. This created such a bond of togetherness and happiness that it permeated the entire event.



The programme included extremely informative and inspiring talks from Bill Jenkins, Shirin Tahzib and Fidelma Meehan, a variety of workshops (from rhythm and other artistic delights to discussions and slides of Haifa).

Over three evenings, commencing with an Eastern night (said to have been the best entertainment at a school 'ever'), there was a feast of fun and happiness as many participants shared their skills and talents with us. The youngsters also had a film night and Karaoke (enjoyed by the not-quite-so-young too!) Attendance was up by nearly 40% with a record number boarding at the college.

External affairs

An External Affairs Desk has been set up with the appointment of its first secretary - Mavis Bodenham. This office, once furnished, will deal with representing the Bahá'ís of Wales in relation to the civil authorities of the principality. Other issues such as contacting the media, dealing with phone enquiries and being the contact point for outside organizations will also be part of external affairs in Wales.

One example of external affairs work

The Driver Vehicle and Licensing Authority, based at Swansea, asked the Bahá'ís to write a brief introduction to the Faith for inclusion in their 'Multi-Cultural Awareness' booklet being prepared for their large contingent of staff. A Council member, also representing the Faith on the new Interfaith Council for Wales is now assisting with the production of the entire Booklet.

Change in Council membership

Gillian Phillips, who served on the Council for 6 months until 21st April, has left Wales to begin service for the National Spiritual Assembly of Ireland in their 'Area Growth Programme'. She will be sadly missed. Soheyl Azordegan replaces Gillian. Welcome to Soheyl and our loves goes with Gillian.

Inter-Institutional Meeting

The Council hosted the 1st Welsh inter-institutional meeting on 6th May - Llandrindod Wells to discuss the 9th January letter to the Continental Board of Counsellors in relation to the Five Year Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to build a united vision of growth within the Principality. 32 believers attended including Counsellor Razavi, Rita Bartlett (National Spiritual Assembly representative), Auxiliary Board members Habib Behi and Azar Melville, assistants, Welsh Training Institute members, Association of Bahá'í Women (Wales), all Council members and various bodies under the Council (Spring School Committee, Youth Camps Committee, Undod editorial) and representatives from the Local Spiritual Assemblies

Counsellor Razavi shared many insights into the new Plan and raised the level of understanding of its requirements. He later guided the assembled friends in a more detailed study of Systematic Programmes of Growth. Working in small groups time was spent on getting to grips with the conditions necessary to initiate area growth programmes and identifying clusters of localities in Wales that could work together. Having access to local knowledge through the friends in attendance greatly enhances the Council's ability to realistically cluster localities. Involvement in this exercise brought home to everyone that had our National Spiritual Assembly delayed making the necessary boundary changes it would be almost impossible to initiate work on the directives of the House of Justice at the start of this Five Year Plan

The Council was also able to share information on many of its indispensable endeavours currently engaged in other than those directly related to 'Systematic Programmes of Growth' which are at the heart of the Five Year Plan.

Through the constant encouragement, guidance and inspiration of Counsellor Razavi the friends acquired a united vision of growth which should spread with relative ease to all the friends in Wales. The Council owes a great debt of gratitude to our beloved Counsellor.

Bahá'í Council for Wales

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Bahá'í Councils and Training Institutes 

Bahá'í Council for Scotland

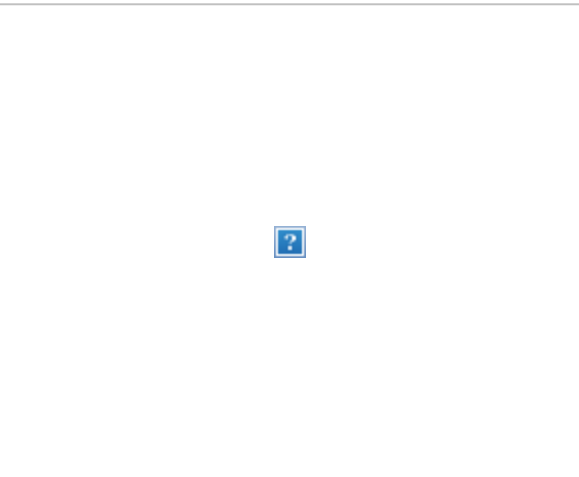
Annual Scottish Gathering

The end of May and beginning of June

proved to be a very busy and exciting time for the Council. On May 30, the Bahá'ís were invited to lead the Scottish Parliament in prayer. The very next day saw the official opening of the St Mungo museum exhibition on the Bahá'í Faith (see below for details).

The Council was delighted to welcome a good cross section of the friends to the Annual Scottish Gathering at Cardonald College near Glasgow over the weekend of June 2-3. There was a full programme running for all age groups. Rita Bartlett opened the Gathering with a loving message of greeting from the National Spiritual Assembly. The Council then gave a summary of the achievements of its

One Year Plan and a short briefing on how it aims to tackle the Five Year Plan. The Training Institute Board for Scotland followed this with a presentation which showed the



The Bahá'í Council for Scotland taking refuge from the fierce Scottish sun. Hari Docherty, Rolf Schmitt, Anwen Shahim, Venus Alae-Carew, Allan Forsyth, Nahid Donald, Alan MacKay, Maggie Manvell, and Parvin Morrissey.

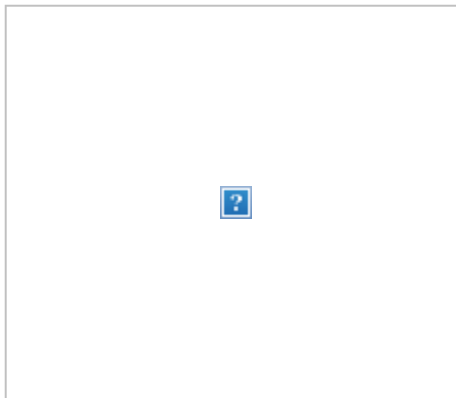
importance of the Institutes to the progress of the Faith.

The two keynote speakers, Counsellor Shahriar Razavi, and Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Republic of Ireland, Brendan McNamara, hardly had a minute spare as they addressed each of the age groups in turn. The Counsellor explained very clearly the process we are about to embark upon in the Five Year Plan, and Brendan McNamara inspired us with stories about Hand of the Cause, George Townshend's unstinting, selfless service to the Faith and his devotion to the Guardian. Consultation took place on issues relating to the expansion of the Faith in the Islands and workshops on the Five Year Plan encouraged the friends to adopt a fresh mind set appropriate to the Fifth Epoch.

Thanks to the many people who contributed; the participants; the speakers and workshop facilitators; the Youth Task Force for arranging the youth programme; the Finn family and Lorna for helping with the children and giving us a celilidh; Transforming Arts Scotland for performing the dances; Ricky Pooran for the football matches; the organisers of the wonderful devotionals which had a beautiful Celtic flavour; the Association of Bahá'í Women for their lovely stall; the representatives from BASED-UK and from Huququllah for their valuable contributions.

Sixty-thousand to see Bahá'í Exhibition

Thursday 31 May 2001 saw the opening of what is arguably the biggest public proclamation of the Baha'i Faith ever to have taken place in the UK. The St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, situated in the precincts of Glasgow Cathedral, is hosting an exhibition entitled, "One Planet, One People: The Baha'is - A Worldwide Community", till 21 October.



St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art.

At the opening reception, attended by some fifty invited guests, Mr Mark O'Neil (head of Glasgow Museums) expressed his happiness that the museum was displaying something befitting the contribution that Baha'is have long made to inter-faith relations in the city of Glasgow. He acknowledged the difficulty of fitting the Baha'is into the museum, since they do not use ritual objects, priestly costumes, or any of the other artifacts which represent the other religions on display there. However, he said that the wait was more than made up for by the "vividly visual and stunning" quality of the Baha'i exhibition, which he was sure would prove to be one of the most popular in the museum's nine-year history.

Professor Frank Whaling, Emeritus Professor of the Study of Religion at the University of Edinburgh, who was introduced as "a friend of the Baha'is" spoke for several minutes on his impression of the Baha'i community in Scotland, its contribution to the religious life of the nation, and its potential for the future. The Baha'is present were certainly stunned by the lavish praise which he gave the Faith; Professor Whaling said the kind of things that Baha'is could never get away with saying about themselves in public, and everyone was delighted with his contribution, which set a very positive, welcoming and inclusive tone.

Mrs Parvin Morrissey, chair of the Baha'i Council for Scotland, pointed out that, although there have been Baha'i communities formally established in the country for over 50 years, this would be the first real chance for members of the public to find out for themselves the details of the origin, history, beliefs and practices of the Baha'is in Scotland and around the world.

The St Mungo Museum anticipates that some 40,000 to 60,000 visitors will have the opportunity to see the exhibition over the next five months, a large number of them coming from overseas. The Baha'i Council for Scotland and the Local Spiritual Assembly of Glasgow have organized a number of special events throughout that period.

"O Lord! Bestow Thy gracious aid and confirmation upon this just government"

A unique and historic event took place on May 30 when Alex Reid, the Parliamentary Officer for the Bahá'í Council for Scotland, led the Scottish Parliament in prayer in its Time for Reflection session. Echoes of 'Abdu'l Bahá's visit to Edinburgh in 1913, resounded through the chamber as Alex opened his presentation with the prayer which begins, " O Lord! Bestow Thy gracious aid and confirmation upon this just government."⁽¹⁾

The Parliament was given the greetings of the Bahá'í community and encouraged to view diversity in the positive light explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"The diversity of the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music, where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord."⁽²⁾

Alex finished with the prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in his letter to Queen Victoria which was specifically directed towards democratic assemblies and parliaments:

"O my God! I ask Thee by Thy Most Glorious Name to aid me in that which will cause the affairs of Thy servants to prosper, and Thy cities to flourish. Thou indeed hast power over all things."⁽²⁾

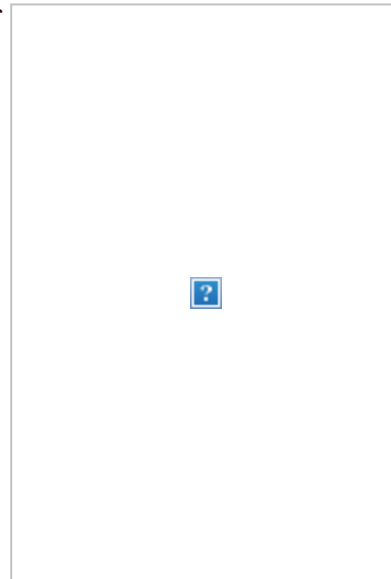
Those friends present in the public gallery were moved by the dignity, power and force of the presentation, and remarked on the impressive effect which was evident in the attitude and response of the Members of the Scottish Parliament, and the Deputy Presiding Officer, Mr George Reid.

Few doubted that the presence of the Master, who Himself had spoken in Rainy Hall, less than 100 yards from the debating chamber, and had attended a recital in St Giles Cathedral directly opposite, guided the proceedings.

1 *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 170.

2. *Paris Talks*, p. 53

3. *Epistle to the Sone of the Wolf*, p. 61



Parliamentary Officer for the Bahá'í Council for Scotland, Mr Alex Reid, at the entrance to the Scottish Parliament.

Bahá'í Council for Scotland

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