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Developing the Three Core Activities

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The National Spiritual Assembly invites you to take this opportunity to consider how these three core activities of the Plan can be further multiplied and integrated, and transformed into “portals for entry by troops”.

(Message to Unit Conventions, 2002)

Devotional Meetings

Concentrating resources in Ayr cluster brings success

WE ARE A cluster group of five communities with eight Bahá'ís in total and we were inspired to hold devotional meetings open to all through the message from the Universal House of Justice. We always hold Feast Days and Holy Days together being so few in number. After consultation we felt we could manage to host a tranquillity zone type of devotional and decided to have six meetings in each of the localities with another one in Ayr, the main town, to make up nineteen in total. We chose the title, “Sacred Space” to present our meetings.

The first two, held in West Kilbride, were on the subject of “God is one” and “The Gift of Earth”. We chose music to be interspersed with a group of readings. We presented our programme in a local café after normal opening hours. This turned out to be a bit costly as we paid for the hire of the cafe, staff time as well as the refreshments. However it was a cosy and welcoming atmosphere with bistro-type tables, candle-lanterns and soft lighting, and although the numbers were quite small we felt it had been a great success.

We became more adventurous and felt confident enough to make up a programme ourselves. This proved to be more arduous than first imagined. Finding readings from the Bahá'í scriptures was fairly easy, as we had Devotional Meetings Concentrating resources in Ayr cluster brings success chosen to theme the devotional. But it proved harder and time consuming when finding readings from other religions and other sources on the chosen theme. We found the local library invaluable for this purpose. The production of the booklet brought tears of laughter and frustration as we discovered how unskilled we were with computers and the associated software required to produce a booklet of any description – never mind one worthy of the Faith. Our first attempt was upside down and back to front and completely out of the desired order. The third event was held in the music room of the local community centre. The atmosphere was totally different as we had live music played on the piano. The room was much larger and we had leaflets and a visitor's book on display.

The following three were held in a Cancer Care Centre in Kilwinning. The room was very comfortable with proper armchairs. We took our own lighting together with candles to create an ambient atmosphere. The music was a mixture of recorded and live keyboard playing. By this time we were becoming more confident and organised. Friends had their



playing by and that he was becoming more confident and organized. Friends had their own duty in creating the right environment and number attending rose to fifteen.

Kilmarnock was the next venue, a sheltered housing complex was Developing the Three Core Activities chosen. Twenty-four people came, nineteen of whom were non-Bahá'ís. We tried various formats with music playing throughout, with the sound lowered during readings, starting and stopping after grouped readings and playing after every reading. We always offered refreshments after the programme, which gave us time to mingle with everyone.

As a result of the interest and enthusiasm of the non-Bahá'í regulars they suggested an evening of "Thought Sharing" as none were ready or willing to take part in a fireside or similar type of discussion on the Faith. After consultation, we chose a particular themed booklet. The thought sharing was held at a friend's home which provided an informal and friendly atmosphere. Any one could read in turn if they so desired, and everyone was very relaxed and more than willing to share thoughts which have led to lively and stimulating evenings.

This is an ongoing process and our cluster is committed to continue to offer more devotional Sacred Space evenings and to gather for "Thought Sharing". We are planning to pray together to ask for assistance for the success of these forthcoming meetings and would welcome other's prayers too.

The Bahá'ís of Ayrshire

Children's Classes

The Oxfordshire friends started children's classes – and they have grown from 8 to 14 in three weeks

WE HAVE BEEN trying to start children's classes in our cluster ever since the start of the Five Year Plan and just were not able to do so. We have very few Bahá'í children in the cluster and the children we do have, come from a variety of age ranges. Although we always knew that the spiritual education we want to offer is for the whole of society and not only our Bahá'í community, we did not know how to reach and invite non-Bahá'í children. By November 2002, eleven Bahá'ís in our cluster had been trained in Book 3 on giving children's classes. However, despite having eleven children's class teachers, we still did not know how and where to start.

At our reflection meeting in April 2003, when discussing the three core activities and the successes we have had, the only success to report on children's classes was that we had 11 trained human resources to run classes for children.

On the same weekend, however, another Book 3 was completed in our cluster and this group had managed to invite two or three Bahá'í children for its practice class. The class was so successful that a Bahá'í parent who came to pick up his daughter was most impressed. This same Bahá'í, together with his wife, decided to start a class to which they would also invite the children of some of their non-Bahá'í friends. A planning meeting was called to which everyone in the cluster was invited and several of the Book 3 participants attended.

Only two weeks later, on a Saturday afternoon, the first children's class took place. Eight children attended four of whom were not Bahá'ís. A week later, eleven children came to the class, six of whom were not Bahá'ís. And at the last class, there were fourteen children altogether. Two Bahá'í friends who have been trained in Book 3 run the classes. The parents have their own programme next to the children and discuss various subjects of interest to them. Something wonderful has also been the spirit of collaboration between the Bahá'í parents, the teachers and other Bahá'í friends who are eager to support this core activity. This has been a real breakthrough and we now see how easy it actually is to start something that seemed so daunting to us.

Editor's note:

1) The friends should note that it is mandatory to follow the National Spiritual Assembly's

China Protection Proceures (CPP) before undertaking children's classes. Details are available from the National Office. If you have started classes without complying with the CPP, you should contact the National Office immediately for guidance.

2) All children's educational activities should conform with the National Syllabus, "Waiting on the Blessed Beauty"

Study Circles

How one friend let "deeds, not words" be their adorning, put aside their fears and let faith dictate their actions

"Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, shall it be opened."(1)

THESE WORDS resonate strongly with me when I think of my experience of inviting people to study circles. Unless you ask you will never know who would be willing to join a study circle. The approach I took was simply to make a list of all the people whom I felt I could invite to join a Book 1 study circle, some of whom I knew well and others not so well, and then systematically invited each one. Each invitation I made was as individual as the person I was inviting. To some I mentioned that they might enjoy looking at the topics covered in Book 1, such as Understanding the class, there were fourteen children altogether. Two Bahá'í friends who have been trained in Book 3 run the classes. The parents have their own programme next to the children and discuss various subjects of interest to them. Something wonderful has also been the spirit of collaboration between the Bahá'í parents, the teachers and other Bahá'í friends who are eager to support this core activity. This has been a real breakthrough and we now see how easy it actually is to start something that seemed so daunting to us. Bahá'í Writings, Prayer, Life and Death. Or I simply said that I was running a course entitled "Reflecting on the Life of the Spirit" and gave no more information. Often it is enough to arouse people's curiosity and leave the rest to their sense of search and inquisitiveness.

I was actually surprised by the number of people who said yes, and who were at least interested in coming to the introduction evening and seeing what it was all about. The way that I rationalised my audacity at asking the range of people I asked was simply that I wanted to think I had at least given people around me the chance to say "yes" to participating in a study circle. A friend of mine once said to me: "If you always try, you may fail but if you never try, you always fail." Surprisingly no matter how small we believe our own network to be, often it is larger than we might have thought of at first.

When you appreciate something profoundly enough, you do not wish to deprive yourself of its impact on your life. In the same way that you do not wish to deprive yourself of being with your beloved or of expressing the love you have for them. I feel this way about being a tutor of Book 1. Once you have taken part in study circles and have an understanding, no matter how slight, of the transformative power of engaging, through reflection, service and coming together, with the Word of God, you also want others to benefit from it. The impulse, then, to invite family, old university friends, people we met on our travels, colleagues, neighbours or friends of friends to share in this dynamic process is one which you are happy to give in to! To put others in touch with the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh in the way that study circles do is, I believe mystical, for as Bahá'u'lláh Himself bears eloquent testimony:

"Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmuteth the souls of men!"(2)

Holly Twiname

1 Confessions of St Augustine, Book 12

2 Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 156

