



Bahá'í Activities in South Africa



[Friends attending a deepening on Huqá'quÁ'IIÁh in Mdantsane, South Africa](#)

WHEN MY wife arranged a six week work placement in East London in South Africa, I contacted the CIPTT to find out whether I could be useful to the Bahá'ís there. Having been given

the email addresses of three Bahá'í families in East London, I soon found out that there were many opportunities for service.

The first arrangement made was with the Principal of a Secondary School. A Bahá'í had previously taught "Life Skills" to some of the classes, but was not currently available to continue the project. However, he explained to me how it had been done before, and I followed his guidelines. I agreed to take three Year Nine classes once a week. After introducing myself I invited the students to write down questions for me anonymously, perhaps questions they would not like to ask their parents, anything at all. Once these had been collected and mixed up, I gave my personal answers to some of them, but of course I had Bahá'í teachings in mind as I spoke. Some students had written several questions, so there were enough to last for three weeks. In each class, sooner or later, after hearing my viewpoint on a topic, someone asked, "Why do you believe that?" Then I told them about the Bahá'í Faith and they were very interested.

The next project I became involved with was the preparation of some songs for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations (by November 2003 there had been Bahá'ís in South Africa for 50 years). A very enthusiastic black youth group were having difficulty because some of the boys' voices had broken, making singing of high notes impossible, so I wrote bass parts for some of their songs and helped them with rehearsals.

Having had an opportunity to find out about the local culture, I was asked to prepare and facilitate marriage courses for two youth groups. Since I had taken a copy of my Education Resources CD-ROM with me, I agreed. After much editing, I managed to produce appropriate booklets, then organised a one-day course in a remote village and a series of three Sunday mornings in the Bahá'í centre, which is in the black township called Mdantsane, about half an hour's drive from the city.

The three Core Activities had my support when possible. There is a weekly Devotional Meeting in East London and while I was there a contact from Zimbabwe was regularly

attending while she had temporary work in the area. Children's classes take place three or four times a week in Mdantsane; I helped with singing during the class at the Bahá'í-centre, but was unable to take part in the others due to lack of transport. The only public transport between East London and Mdantsane (apart from trains, which only run to East London in the morning and back to Mdantsane in the afternoon) is provided by minibuses crammed with 20 or 30 people and I was advised not to try those! A study circle using

Ruhi Book 4 started while I was there and I was able to attend the first three sessions, some of my time being spent looking after a toddler so that her mother could concentrate on the material. Another study circle was using a book for junior youth prepared in Zambia, the idea being to train some youth to become facilitators for that book; I attended all the sessions and it was very interesting.

During my stay there was a public holiday and a deepening on Huq^oqu^h had been arranged. There was a good attendance, people were able to come from a wide area for this daytime event, and it emphasised the integration of races which has happened over the last nine years. My presence was greatly appreciated, since I was able to explain quickly the meaning of many long English words which no-one else present understood. The Spiritual Assembly has jurisdiction over a large region called Buffalo City, which includes East London, Mdantsane, Bisho and King Williams Town. I consulted with them regarding having a web site, and left a simple example which will be considered for implementation at a later date.

Two sad events took place during my stay, each involving a person who had been the only Bah^h in their family. One was a memorial meeting held by a family in Mdantsane, to which all the local Bah^hs were invited, and Bah^h participation in the service was requested. The other was a funeral in a remote village called Tsaba and the complete event lasted at least five hours; half an hour of singing in the women^s hut (where many women had been all night for a prayer vigil), a service of two hours (including a Bah^h eulogy) in a large tent which had been erected adjoining the women^s hut (most of the men stood outside for this), half an hour going to the burial site, half an hour Methodist committal, Bah^h Prayer for the Dead, half an hour getting back to the family home, and an hour serving the 200 people lunch from the outdoor kitchen (on our arrival we saw a sheep being cut up for this). Bottles of Coke and Fanta were provided to drink.

A fireside was arranged while I was there, and I talked about science and religion using some visual aids. Another fireside on the theme of ^h“Encouragement^h” was due to take place after I had left, so I provided some materials for it; some annotated quotations and a song I composed on that theme.

Although the community included a competent guitarist and several people who could lead singing, no-one could read music, so I borrowed a keyboard and recorded a tape of some of the songs with which they were not familiar. The South Africans have a great love of singing, which was made clear to me amongst the Bah^hs and elsewhere; most of it is unaccompanied except for a leader who smacks a small leather cushion to keep time and indicate the last chorus.

There were two Nineteen Day Feasts in East London while I was there, and after each one, on the following Sunday morning, another Feast was held at the Bah^h Centre. This arrangement is necessary because of transport difficulties and doubts about the safety of non-residents being present in Mdantsane after dark. (A Bah^h was shot and killed at the Centre in 1994.)

A big gathering, including dinner, for the Birth of the B^b, was arranged for the evening of October 19. This was a very joyous occasion, with much singing, but it also had a sad moment, since it was time for me to say ^h“au revoir^h” (not ^h“goodbye^h”, because I have promised to return ^h– I was able to make that promise because my wife had also been asked to go back and we had discussed this matter and agreed to start saving!).

I really enjoyed my time in Buffalo City and the Bah^hs were very appreciative of my involvement. They had previously requested youth to visit them for a period of service, but after my visit they have extended the invitation to Bah^hs of any age to spend time with them. I can assure you that anyone visiting will receive a very warm welcome and will have a very rewarding experience.

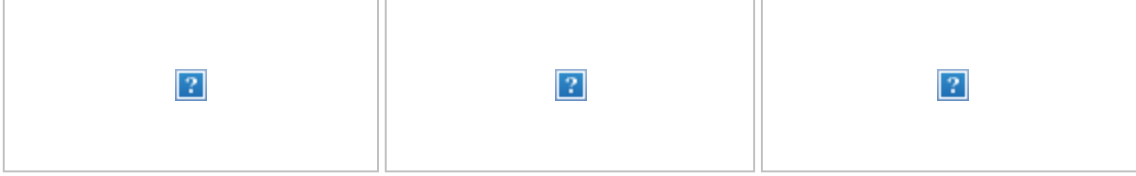
Note what the beloved Guardian said:

^h“^h the victories won in both Africa and the Pacific area are as our Guardian himself

pointed out, due in no small measure to the remarkable spiritual receptivity of the people in those parts of the world.Â”

(Ministry of the Custodians, p. 347)

Alan Woodhurst



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