

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1 January 2022

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dearly loved Friends,

Over the twenty-five-year period that ended at Ridván 2021, the endeavours of training institutes to help the friends enhance their capacity for service were central to progress. When, at the beginning of the last series of global Plans, we called for systematic attention to be given to devising methods for training large numbers of believers, institutes faced the task of developing their own materials or selecting from those readily available. Generally, institutes found it challenging to develop new materials; however, those that adopted the courses prepared by the Ruhi Institute were able to make rapid progress. Therefore, as was stated in our message to you of 28 December 2005, we determined that the books of the Ruhi Institute, which had proven their efficacy, would constitute the main sequence of courses of institutes everywhere at least for the remainder of that series of Plans. The extensive use of these courses, as well as of the lessons and texts for the spiritual education of children and junior youth, expedited the advance of the institute process across the globe. Now, with the Bahá'í world embarked on a new series of global Plans, we have considered again the question of the materials of training institutes and wish to convey our conclusions.

The knowledge and insights, the spiritual qualities and attitudes, and the skills and abilities for service treated in the courses of the Ruhi Institute remain vital to the efforts of Bahá'í communities. Therefore, these materials will continue to be a prominent feature of the educational endeavours of all training institutes during this new series of global Plans. We are aware that the Ruhi Institute will, during the Nine Year Plan, seek to complete the preparation of all the materials it has outlined for use in children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles, and the revision of published editions as necessary in light of experience. However, beyond what it has already delineated, it is not expected to develop new materials to be used worldwide.

In our message dated 30 December 2021 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, we highlighted how pleased we have been to observe the rich body of knowledge and insights which the friends, labouring in diverse social and cultural contexts, are generating about aspects of the community-building process. The friends are also becoming increasingly adept at identifying needs related to growth that are emerging naturally from efforts at the grassroots. These developments have implications for the systems for preparing and refining educational materials. We have thus concluded that it would now be propitious for more attention to be paid to extending the capacity to prepare educational materials, particularly in relation to supplementary materials and branch courses.

When we addressed the question of materials for the education of children and junior youth in our message to you of 12 December 2011, we indicated that, beyond the materials that are the core of each of these programmes, teachers and animators would, often in consultation with the institute coordinator at the cluster level, determine whether or not additional elements would be required to reinforce the educational process. The impressive advances in many parts of the world with regard to offering spiritual education to large numbers of children and junior youth have certainly involved a growing capacity of teachers and animators to wisely supplement the study of the lessons and texts with appropriate elements on the basis of their specific circumstances. Notable in this respect are elements related to artistic activity and service projects. Nonetheless, when the need to supplement the study of a particular topic has been felt across a country or region, some institutes have themselves developed or adopted additional materials and have arranged for them to be disseminated more extensively. These supplementary items have, for the

most part, been simple elements, such as songs or stories. A similar experience is unfolding in relation to the main sequence of courses, although the additional materials that some institutes have introduced in this connection, which include compilations from the Bahá'í writings on specific topics and case studies of relevant experience, tend to be of a more complex nature.

The flourishing of a vibrant process of spiritual education in growing numbers of clusters will require of institutes a well-developed ability to oversee the appropriate introduction of supplementary elements. In this, institutes must be as much concerned with reinforcing the educational process as with maintaining its integrity. They will thus need to bear in mind the various cautions we set out in our 12 December 2011 message. They must, of course, also guard against overwhelming the friends with diverse additional elements that, by their sheer volume, might inadvertently detract from the effective delivery of the principal materials.

Concerning branch courses, how they are to emerge must be understood in the context of the dynamics in countries and regions where the community-building process is advancing with intensity. As many more friends dedicate themselves to promoting the various activities to which the study of institute courses gives rise, distinct areas of learning associated with each of these activities steadily take shape in the life of a population. Some of these areas of learning, such as those concerned with collective worship, deepening, and teaching, are supported by Area Teaching Committees, while others related to the spiritual education of children, junior youth, and youth and adults are fostered by the training institutes. Additional areas of learning supported by other agencies also gradually come into place as more and more people study the higher courses of the institute's sequence. As the endeavours in each of these areas are sustained by growing numbers of friends, fresh insights are generated that are distinctive in that they arise from systematic effort undertaken in a particular social and cultural setting. There is an increasing understanding of what other concepts, approaches, abilities, and attitudes are essential to advancing an aspect of the community-building process. These become objects of conversation in periodic gatherings held to consult and reflect on the experience being gained. Aside from the initiatives individuals or institutions and agencies may take to respond to these needs, the institute might decide to promote the use of a supplementary material as described above. Over time, what is learned is captured by the institutions and agencies of the Faith in various documents, narrative accounts, and case studies which, in their totality, constitute a record of unfolding experience. When a sizeable body of knowledge accumulates, it becomes possible to further systematize it by developing a branch course.

We have in the past likened the main sequence to the trunk of a tree that supports other courses branching from it, each branch addressing some specific area of action. The preparation of such branch courses would necessarily occur over time through a pattern marked by action and reflection and in which conceptualization and activity in the field go hand in hand. For training institutes that take on this task, there are several requisites. They will need to be able to understand profoundly the content of the institute's main sequence and the pedagogical principles involved, analyse clearly the experience arising at the grassroots as activities advance, collaborate with teams of friends dedicated to the progress of specific aspects of the community-building process, operate in a learning mode, and draw into their work individuals with abilities needed for preparing materials. Once in place, the branch course would help the friends promoting the related activity to further strengthen their capacity, and it would contribute to extending the associated process of learning in the life of the population. The course would also serve as a repository of the accruing knowledge and as a means for its propagation.

Developing materials of this nature is a complex exercise, and it is of course not a goal that every training institute develop its own branch courses. Training institutes, in consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly and the Counsellors, will determine when it is timely to develop or adopt such additional educational materials. Many institutes will simply select branch courses appropriate to their needs from those of proven effectiveness created by other institutes. Beyond

branch courses, it is anticipated that institutes will in the future prepare or adopt other types of courses, which may be integrated in some way into the main sequence or be offered separately. This will, naturally, require the acquisition of even greater capacity by the institutes. However, notwithstanding the far-reaching effects of their efforts, institutes are not expected to address all the educational needs of the Bahá'í community. Within diverse populations, large-scale growth will lead to new educational endeavours to address other pressing demands.

We are confident that, as the friends labour in all regions to release the society-building power of the Faith, the years ahead will witness a significant further expansion of the capacity of training institutes to provide spiritual education to large numbers and to generate, apply, and disseminate knowledge. As part of its mandate to watch over the process of human resource development, we have asked the International Teaching Centre to follow closely the raising of capacity for preparing educational materials. It will establish mechanisms for supporting the institutes and for ensuring that what is learned is appropriately propagated.

We will beseech the Blessed Beauty in the Holy Shrines that the operations of training institutes, these vital agencies of the Faith, may ever receive His unfailing blessings and confirmations.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]