

Ridvan 2010 Annual Report



**The Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of the City of New York**

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***The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the City
of New York,
Cluster Agencies,
and Collaborators***

Letter from the Spiritual Assembly

I eagerly anticipate the day when New York will become a blessed spot from which the call to steadfastness in the Covenant of God will go forth to every part of the world, thus making that city outstanding from every point of view.

Bless Thou, O King of Kings, the city of New York! Cause the friends there to be kind to one another. Purify their souls and make their hearts to be free and detached. Illumine the world of their consciousness. Exhilarate their spirits and bestow celestial power and confirmation upon them. Establish there a heavenly realm, so that the City of Bahá may prosper and New York be favoured with blessings from the Abhá Kingdom, that this region may become like the all-highest Paradise, may develop into a vineyard of God and be transformed into a heavenly orchard and a spiritual rose garden.

- Abdu'l-Bahá

Dear friends,

After last year's acceleration in the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in New York City, our community continued to learn this year about the process of expansion and consolidation. Many of us grew to better understand what it means to plan and carry out the teaching work based on local resources available. While the approaches and goals of every sector was neighborhood-specific, capacity building through the institute process was at the heart of all planning and action. We struggled to better understand collective efforts in direct teaching. We strove to develop a clearer vision of Bahá'í community life. We prayed for divine assistance in bringing the Message of Baha'u'llah to everyone around us.

Every member of our community labored to contribute to the work of the Faith through prayer, teaching, participation in core activities, home-front pioneering, service in administrative roles, and sacrificial offers of wealth, time, and resources. While some efforts were local at the grassroots, others were visible to many. This year, for the first time, a community website was launched that allowed community members to widely advertise events and provided seekers easy access to activities throughout the cluster.

Among the many blessings our community received over the last year was the opportunity to send long and short-term pioneers, travel teachers, and other resource people to clusters near and far. These servants shared learning between clusters and contributed in untold ways to the community.

Another aspect of our community where growth and developing maturity was apparent was the fund. Just as it is impossible to promote the Faith without active participation of its followers, the fund - the "lifeblood of the Cause" - also plays critical role. Though overall contributions decreased this last year, more Baha'is than ever enrolled in our Automatic Contribution System and we reduced overall expenses, resulting in a positive net income.

Finally, through the crises endured by the Bahá'ís in Iran, our community experienced great victories. Efforts to defend and raise awareness of the circumstances in Iran included two devotional meetings at the center and many others in the homes of individuals, outreach to members of Congress asking them to co-sponsor legislation and inviting them to prayer gatherings in honor of the seven imprisoned Bahá'í leaders, and one large public event held in early April at Hunter College. These activities promoted the name of the Faith among friends, contacts, and seekers. Moreover, they engaged the participation of prominent politicians, artists, journalists, activists, and other figures who continue to praise and support the Faith in many circles.

Our prayer is that the next year will bring substantial advancement in the growth of our community and our ability to serve all the souls in our area. We are full of loving gratitude for the sacrificial services of every individual member of our community.

With loving greetings,

The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the City of New York

Office of the Secretary

This year, the Local Spiritual Assembly's secretariat was made up of Alemash Asfaw, Paula Absolon, Adib Birkland, and Eric Kreitzer forming a subcommittee of the Assembly; and Clyde Herring, who manages the office at the Bahá'í Center. The following are updates of specific areas that the secretariat focused on and those who served in various roles.

Membership: The community database is updated each time somebody joins the Faith or when people move. Alex Motamed, who contributed in this area for many years, stepped down from the role after many years of service.

Web site redevelopment : Much work was done by Thane Terrill on the redevelopment of the community's web site and it was launched over the past year. Michael Rymer also contributes significantly. The new website is designed with the intention of supporting an A cluster. Currently, it has an average of 25-75 visitors a day and the most viewed page is our events page, where visitors learn about what is going on in the cluster.

Newsletter: Roja Mirzadeh began the year as the newsletter's editor, gathering information about the community and editing copies of the newsletter. She was succeeded by Arvid Nelson, until he moved out of the cluster.

Pioneer Resource person: Jeremy Thimm served in this capacity until moving from the cluster. Saman Farid now oversees the processing of pioneering requests and the promotion of awareness of the needs of the Faith.

Holy Days: Like last year, a special effort was made again to emphasize the Ridvan Holy Days. Naw-Rúz was celebrated both centrally and in neighborhood gatherings. Thanks to the Holy Day Task Force for their sacrificial service and efforts to learn about the commemoration of Holy Days as our community develops.

Sunday Devotional Committee: The committee holds weekly devotional services at the Baha'i Center, and assists seekers who attend the devotional to engage in other community activities.

Interfaith participation and presentation of the Faith: Every year, the secretariat receives requests from various groups for Baha'i representation at interfaith activities. This year representatives were sent to activities including those held at the New Seminary Interfaith and at Our Lady of Carmel Church

Feast Area Committees: In recent years, our community has moved from a single 19-Day Feast to an increasingly decentralized model. This has not been without its challenges, but we continue to learn how to address the needs of an evolving cluster. Since last Ridvan we added two more feasts for a total of ten neighborhood feasts throughout the city. Despite difficulties, we have seen increased action and improved consultation result from the smaller, more focused feasts.

The Assembly greatly appreciates the following volunteers who gave sacrificially of their time:

Bookstore: Winsome Linton

Feast Area Committees: Those who served on committees over the last year include: Hiromi Kubo-Alexay, Jayce Bartok, Berglind Birkland, Luke and Caity Bolton, Nicole Corea, Cecily David, Heather Donaldson, Eme Ekpe-Enyosiobi, Martha Estafanos, Saman Farid, Mahin Gandomi, Claire Ho, Maryam Ishani, Mokay Kamara, Paul Kinney, Tavoria Lawrence, Dorothy Mazlum, Talieh Monajjem, Juliane Motamed, Tahirih Naylor, Yazdan Pourjafar, Rex Kamal Rampersaud, Mike Relph, Afrose Rosauladin, Michael Rymer, Sabrina Smith-Sweeney, Ramin Taheri, Nader and Elnaz Tamadon, Jeremy Thimm, José Uribe, Carolina Vasquez.

Holy Days Task Force: Diane Nosseir, Mike Slott, Nima Majzoubi, and Tatiana Tchachevsky. The Assembly thanks Mike Relph (who now serves on the ATC) and Mona Moazzaz for their services on the task force.

Unit Convention Tellers: Valerie Rutstein, Reja Sabet, Habib Sabet, Rex Rampersaud, Eme Ekbe, and Nader Tamadon.

Office of Personal Affairs

Personal Affairs is a subcommittee of the Spiritual Assembly that focuses on the development of human resources to provide care to the community and individuals. Through various channels, the Assembly sought this year to focus on education regarding Bahá'í laws and unity. The Assembly also developed a network of mediators available for circumstances when two parties experience disunity due to different types of disagreements or conflict.

Marriage Task Force: The Marriage Task Force was appointed by the Assembly to assist individuals with marriage preparation and difficulties. Its current membership includes Mike Longo, Aeric Meredith-Goujon, Hiromi Kubo-Alexay, Jim Cerqua, and Carolina Vasquez. They can be reached confidentially at 212-606-4032.

Marriage Education Committee: This committee is currently composed of Autumn-Grace Dougherty and Rochelle Arms and its focus is to educate on topics related to courtship, marriage, parental consent, consultation and other marriage-related topics. The Committee holds periodic workshops that are useful to many members of the community.

Interment Space: The Assembly owns 70 plots in the Rose Hill Memorial park in Putnam Valley, NY. Twenty-six plots have been sold so far.

Funeral/Burial Preparation: Under the direction of the Assembly, burial kits have been prepared and are available. Further education of the community would be useful in this area, reminding and encouraging the friends to prepare a will and to support and console bereaved families.

Homebound Believers: The Assembly continues to explore sustainable ways of attending to members of the community who are homebound due to health issues and/or age.

Believers in special need: The Assembly is working on establishing various services in the community utilizing specialized skills and creating a bridge between the Baha'i community and the community at-large to meet the needs of individual members of the community.

Sunday Devotional Committee: Sofia Kasapira, Artemus Stover, Diane Nossier, Alric Jones, Earl Smith and Kristina Golmohammadi. The Assembly thanks Roland Zwicker and Sandrina Day for their devoted service to the community.

Volunteers: Samir Ashraf, Talibah Sun-Boothe, Tavoria Lawrence, Seghid Tewolde, Alex Motamed, Thane Terril, Roya Shanks, Trish Bansi, Hiromi Kubo-Alexay, Sandrina Day, Veronica Shoffstall, Arvid Nelson, and Roja Mirzadeh.

And a special thanks to Ms. Clyde Herring, the Assembly's Office Manager, who continues to work with the friends with love, patience, and wisdom.



Office of the Treasurer

Dearly Loved Friends,

The Office of the Treasurer would like to convey its deepest love and gratitude for the sacrificial contributions that it continues to receive from the members of this blessed community.

Contributions, income, and operational expenses decreased in 166 BE compared to the previous year. However our net income – which is defined as income minus expenses – was positive, as the Spiritual Assembly experienced a stark reduction in operational expenses.

The contributions recorded as of the time of this printing totaled \$202,731 of which \$165,311 was received by the local Fund, some \$33,989 short of the goal of \$199,300. The community also earmarked \$37,420 to the senior Funds, matched by the Local Spiritual Assembly's contribution of \$42,050, totaling \$79,470 of contributions from the New York City Baha'i community to our senior Institutions.

Participation in the Automatic Contribution System increased to 114 individuals, an addition of 7 participants from the previous year.

The Office of the Treasurer wishes to acknowledge and extend its deepest appreciation to the following individuals for their selfless and resolute service throughout the year: Roya Shanks, Trish Bansi, Clyde Herring, and Hiromi Kubo-Alexay.

With love and appreciation,

The Office of the Treasurer

"We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the un-failing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good — this is the secret of right living."

- Shoghi Effendi

ANNUAL INCOME & EXPENSE REPORT: Comparing 166 BE & 165 BE

	166 BE 21 Mar '09-20 Mar '10	165 BE 21 Mar '08-20 Mar '09	% Change
TOTAL INCOME:	\$202,731	\$281,433	-28%
EXPENSES:			
LSA & GENERAL ADMINISTRATION:	\$432	\$5,030	-91%
CENTER MANAGEMENT:	\$39,159	\$81,073	-52%
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARIAT:	\$7,259	\$5,647	29%
OFFICE OF THE TREASURER	\$1,054	\$1,240	-15%
COMMUNITY LIFE & TEACHING	\$8,692	\$12,724	-32%
PERSONAL AFFAIRS	\$92	\$689	-87%
TOTAL SENIOR FUNDS	\$79,470	\$153,619	-48%
PAYROLL EXPENSES	\$46,408	\$48,203	-4%
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$182,566	\$308,225	-41%
TOTAL INCOME	\$202,731	\$281,433	-28%
NET INCOME	\$20,165	-\$26,792	-175%
LOCAL CONTRIBUTIONS INCOME			
Total Local Contributions	\$165,311	\$194,712	
Local Contributions Goal	\$199,300	\$199,300	
Contributions Deficit	\$(33,989)	\$(4,588)	
Average Monthly Deficit (Total Deficit divided by 19)	\$(1,789)	\$(242)	

CONTRIBUTIONS TO SENIOR FUNDS: Total Earmarks From Individuals

CHILEAN FUND	\$7,841	\$39,097
CONTINENTAL FUND	\$1,288	\$854
INTERNATIONAL FUND	\$7,955	\$7,781
KINGDOM FUND	\$1,561	\$1,609
NATIONAL FUND	\$12,066	\$32,240
REGIONAL FUND	\$3,153	\$2,351
WORLD CENTER ENDOWMENT	\$3,556	\$2,123
TOTAL EARMARKS	\$37,420	\$86,055

AUTOMATIC CONTRIBUTION SYSTEM ENROLLMENT

Number of ACS Participants	114	107
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Area Teaching Committee

Over the past year, the teaching work moved towards decentralization. Each neighborhood started learning how to plan, implement, and reflect on its own expansion and consolidation activities. Furthermore, steps were taken to more clearly understand the distinction between individual and collective teaching. Some sectors functioned as a large teaching team and others divided into smaller teaching teams, which met more regularly to pray, study, consult, and reflect.

In most neighborhoods, believers are working to identify receptive populations in their area. In other sectors, such as Washington Heights and Flatbush, the Baha'is are now learning to teach and respond to the needs of these populations.

The ATC's letter to the Feasts every other month served to regularly communicate with the cluster and encourage planning and reflection at a neighborhood level. The Cluster Reflection Gatherings, which had approximately 40-50 people in attendance each cycle, provided a useful forum for the cluster to gather, share learning, and celebrate successes.

Finally, this year saw improvements in the Seeker Response System, through which seekers express their interest to learn more about the Faith online or by telephone. The ATC and those working with it vigorously followed-up with a backlog of names of those wishing to learn more. Visits with these seekers resulted in a number of them deepening further about the Baha'i Faith, participating in core activities, and a handful enrolling as Baha'is.

Developments Each Cycle

Cycle 15

- A dramatic rise in the ownership of the Plan at the neighborhood level
- During this cycle, Neighborhood Teaching Coordinators were invited to serve their respective neighborhoods, helping to coordinate the teaching teams and sector-wide teaching projects.
- Some teams attended gatherings of like-minded organizations, participated in secular community-service activities, and reached out to particular buildings and streets as means of exploring possible receptive populations.
- At least 70 individuals participated in the teaching work during the Expansion Phase and there were 8 enrollments during the cycle. 180 seekers participated in core activities, and at least 49 home visits took place. 32 regular devotional gatherings were running, with a total of 200 people taking part in them, including 60 seekers.

Cycle 16

- Focus was on expanding the circle of people interested in the Faith and seekers in core activities.
- Emphasis was on direct teaching followed by invitations to join a Book 1 study circle.
- Neighborhoods with a receptive population revisited families whose children had attended children's classes to teach them.
- 86 teachers reported teaching during the Expansion Phase, leading to 4 enrollments. 210 seekers took part in core activities, and at least 16 home visits occurred. There were 11 ongoing devotional gatherings, hosting 72 participants, including 51 seekers.

Cycle 17

- A focus on accompaniment to build capacity in friends to serve in various ways.
- An effort to invite those participating in devotional gatherings, as well as the families of children and junior youth participating in classes and groups, to join a Book 1 study circle. A number of these seekers enthusiastically accepted.
- During the Expansion Phase, 96 teachers reported participating in the teaching work, leading to 5 enrollments. The number of seekers in core activities was 169, and 11 home visits were reported. 19 ongoing devotional gatherings hosted a total of 160 people including 56 seekers.

Cycle 18

- A focus in the Expansion Phase on carrying out home visits to seekers.
- At Ridvan, the community is now in the consolidation phase of the cycle of growth.
- Some neighborhoods met together for "Teaching Days" and experience a solidarity and collective spirit as they ventured out on their home visits to friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, and community of interest.
- During the Expansion Phase, a total of 45 people carried out 71 home visits to 68 seekers, including 15 direct teaching encounters.



Training Institute

As in many other aspects of the community, the work of the training institute in New York City increasingly occurred at the neighborhood level, with efforts to transform the social and spiritual dynamics of each local community. Many developments became especially evident over the past year in a handful of sectors.

In places where these transformations were particularly apparent, the residents of that community visualized their neighborhood as one where the capacities of each individual worked cohesively with those of others to transform each person and their community. They traced the development of their capacity-building and looked ahead to apply skills and abilities to the needs of the community as identified by tutors and their study circles.

The statistics below illustrate the commitment community members have in building their new civilization through the institute process—the engine of growth for our cluster.



As of January 2009

Completed Ruhi Book 1	Completed Ruhi Book 2	Completed Ruhi Book 3	Completed Ruhi Book 4	Completed Ruhi Book 6	Completed Ruhi Book 7
309	231	177	144	128	95

As of April 2010

Completed Book 1	Completed Book 2	Completed Book 3	Completed Book 4	Completed Book 5	Completed Book 6	Completed Book 7
366	269	181	169	49	154	117

Children's Classes

The New York City cluster put substantial effort into the multiplication of children's classes over the past year. Discussions on the promotion of children's classes were common and individuals in many neighborhoods worked with those close to them to initiate such activities. A guide was finalized that compiled resources for teachers and, more than ever before, the Local Spiritual Assembly took deliberate steps to consult and work closely with our cluster's children's class coordinator.

The majority of children in our classes are from families that are not Bahá'ís and we are now trying to learn about reaching out to the parents and families of these participants. While we are interested in increasing the size of classes, we are also concerned with doing homevisits to the families of the students. We are only beginning to learn about seizing opportunities to bring these families closer to the Faith by having other activities branch from the children's classes.

A major challenge at the moment involves a shortage of teachers to respond to the requests and needs of the community at large. It almost seems as if reaching receptive populations is not as difficult right now as being prepared to meet their requests for children's classes.

At a Glance: Children's Classes this Ridvan

- 7 neighborhood classes, involving approximately 45 children, 24 of which come from Bahá'í families
- 2 centrally-organized, seasonal classes (as part of the Children's Theater Company), involving 26 children, all from families that are not Bahá'í
- 4 study circles doing Ruhi Book 3, involving at least 19 participants
- 14 active children's class teachers out of a potential 181 trained in Ruhi Book 3



Junior Youth

Over past year, our community took many steps to advance the Junior Youth Empowerment Program. We stand at eight junior youth groups in the cluster this Ridvan, an increase of one since last year. Despite this modest growth, the Training Institute trained many individuals in Ruhi Book 5 and is continuing to work systematically to hold regular intensive Animator training sessions.

Plans for this coming year include moving to a cycle of training, animator gatherings, and regular visits to existing Junior Youth groups and potential Animators. A goal, developed through an evaluation of available resources and receptive neighborhoods, is to more than double to number of junior youth groups and have established at least 20 by Ridvan 2011.