

The Nine-Year Plan  
Fostering Spiritual Health  
British Columbia Virtual Winter School, January 2026

I am grateful to the Bahá'í Council of British Columbia for giving me this opportunity to share with you some of my personal thoughts today as you have gathered at a time when we are about to enter the second phase of the Nine-Year Plan, to reflect on fostering spiritual health.

Let me begin, without my becoming too philosophical, by reminding ourselves of two points. The first point is about what distinguishes us from animals: our souls, a trust bestowed by God only on humans. Based on their inborn instinct, animals have the capacity to act without using conscious reasoning or exercising moral choice. We on the other hand, each have a soul from which springs what is referred to as “Human Agency”, a sacred gift and a capacity to know, to choose, and to act consciously. Physical health comprises the conditions of the material body and allows better functioning of cells and organs, instinctually seeking survival. Spiritual health comprises the conditions of the spirit that orientate human agency towards directing instinct in the service of truth, justice, and the common good, thereby enabling individuals to consciously align their lives with the Divine purpose, both for personal transformation and for the advancement of civilization.

The second point is about the worlds around us as described in the Bahá'í writings. There are Two worlds, it says. The world of matter and the world of relations, the world seen and the world unseen, the physical world and the spiritual world. These two worlds are interconnected and there are things in them that are counterparts of each other: like the material sun being the source of physical light and the Manifestation of God, the source of spiritual light. Understanding the counterpart of the physical world often helps us gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual one. So, in this light, I would like to say a few words about physical health before moving on to spiritual.

Human physical health is more than absence of illness; it is a state of well-being that allows a tranquil active life. It requires motivation, wise choices, practices, discipline, consistency, and resisting temptations of things harmful to health. Knowledge alone of what constitutes a healthy life will not make it a reality; rather, it requires our seeking a stable orientation toward and acting to build a healthy life. That orientation comes when actions become habits. Occasional failures are taken as opportunities to learn rather than to give up. Trusting the advice of health professionals helps us to accept occasional pains that may be experienced for bodybuilding, in order to remain motivated and to continue exercising bearing the pain joyfully. So, you can see that as there are principles and approaches that guide the sound growth of the human body, there are also those that foster our spiritual health.

What is spiritual health? In the Bahá'í writings spiritual health is not treated as a remote mystical state of being, nor is it separated from material life. Spiritual health is an orientation of the soul and mind expressed through virtues and abilities seeking to be a source of unity and to render service. This motivates the person to live a coherent life aligned with God's purpose--the betterment of the world. The implications of spiritual health unfold at different levels: the

individual and Family, the community, and institutions, empowering each with the same mindset, namely that

“... just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the well-being of the entire human race”. (The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013, to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

How does one achieve this spiritual health? We live in a world where for various reasons many are scornful of religious practices and reluctant either to discuss religious subjects or to give credence to the power of faith. This turning away from religion has been powerfully reinforced by the growth of materialism, which has produced comfort for many at the physical level whilst at the same time steadily engendering an ever-increasing lack of interest in, or focus on, the spiritual aspects of life. The result, both socially and psychologically, is catastrophic.

The recent phenomenon of people saying they are “spiritual but not religious” appears to be an attempt to fill a gap created by the materialistic modern life.

Such an atmosphere can create problems for the Bahá'í community in two ways.

First, by making it more difficult to convey the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to people, and second, by affecting us in subtle ways causing us at times to unintentionally look for resemblance between the ideas prevalent in society and practices revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

Here is the foundation of our spiritual health: Our unshakable conviction that the Message of Bahá'u'lláh is indeed the “sovereign remedy” for all the ills of mankind.

What promotes spiritual health? In a letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, the beloved Guardian mention these: Love of Baha'u'llah, firmness in His covenant, adherence to the Revelation of the Blessed Beauty, unquestioning reliance on His promises, reliance on Divine assistance, and engagement in the fields of service to achieve the goals of the Divine Plan (*See the letter dated April 1956 to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in “Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950–1957”, p. 102*). We also read that: The principle of cooperation and mutual assistance shapes our communities, and it endows the body of the Cause with moral vigour and spiritual health (The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 30 December 2021). And again, “...participation in Bahá'í elections ... in the proper spirit, contributes to the health ... of the Bahá'í community” (From a memorandum dated 18 June 1980 to the International Teaching Centre). So, you can see that in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “We don't have to pray and meditate for hours in order to be spiritual”. (*23 November 1947 to an individual believer*).

Fostering spiritual health has always been and will remain central to the aims of any Bahá'í community. Central enough that Bahá'u'lláh established the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God whose responsibility included attending to this matter. And, as you know, in 1968 the Universal House of Justice created the institution of the Counsellors to carry into future the work of the Hands. It was in 1984 when the Supreme Body in its Ridván message told the Bahá'í of the world that: The dedicated services of the Counselors in all the continents, ably supported by the Auxiliary Board members, have been invaluable in fostering the spiritual health of the worldwide community. Today, in discharging their obligations the Counsellors, assisted by their

Auxiliary Boards, endeavor to nurture the roots of certitude, fan the fire of an all-embracing love in the hearts of the friends; They fight old habits of conflict and reinforce bonds of friendship and unity, raising the believers' sight above the limitations of self-centredness, strengthening their allegiance to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, encouraging us to dedicate our energies to the welfare of human race. The Counsellors also guide the educational process associated with the training institute which in the words of the House of Justice "is, of course, helping to foster the spiritual conditions ... that must distinguish the life of the Bahá'í community".

If one were interested in making a list of what Bahá'u'lláh has stated in His Writings, and which has been further stressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice as the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, this can certainly be done; the list, as you will readily appreciate, will be rather long. Following are some of my findings:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
3. The repetition of the Greatest Name, Alláh-u-Abhá, ninety-five times a day.
4. Prayerful meditation on the Teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
5. Teaching the Cause of God.
6. Striving every day to bring our behavior more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.
7. Selfless service both to the Cause and in our profession or trade.
8. Observance of the Law of Huquq, the Right of God.
9. Sacrificial contributions to the Funds of the Faith.
10. Being a source of unity in the community and in the society.
11. Living a life that attracts divine assistance.

Fostering spiritual health, however, involves more than merely observing a number of teachings and ordinances from a list, exalted as such practices may be. Just as physical health is best achieved through "actions animated by a stable orientation toward living a healthy life", Spiritual health is best achieved when it is the outcome of a pattern of active life intertwined with translating into reality what has been revealed by God ~for the betterment of the world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the Bahá'ís of North America:

When Christ appeared with those marvelous breaths of the Holy Spirit, the children of Israel said, "We are quite independent of him; we can do without him and follow Moses; we have a book and in it are found the teachings of God; what need, therefore, have we of this man?" Christ said to them, "The book sufficeth you not." Is it possible for a man to hold to a book of medicine and say, "I have no need of a doctor; I will act according to the book; in it every disease is named, all symptoms are explained, the diagnosis of each ailment is completely written out, and a prescription for each malady is furnished; therefore, why do I need a doctor?" This is sheer ignorance. A physician is needed to prescribe. Through his skill the principles of the book are correctly and effectively applied until the patient is restored to health. Christ was a heavenly Physician. He brought spiritual health and healing into the world. Bahá'u'lláh is, likewise, a divine

Physician. He has revealed prescriptions for removing disease from the body politic and has remedied human conditions by spiritual power. Therefore, mere knowledge is not sufficient for complete human attainment. The teachings of the Holy Books need a heavenly power and divine potency to carry them out. (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Talks in Dublin, 5-6 August 1912*)

'Abdu'l-Bahá also offers the following analogy: (*Promulgation*)

“A house is not built by mere acquaintance with the plans. //Money must be forthcoming; //volition [that is desire, decision, disciplined efforts] //is necessary to construct it; //a carpenter must be employed in its erection. It is not enough to say, “The plan and purpose of this house are very good; I will live in it.” There are no walls of protection, there is no roof of shelter in this mere statement; the house must be actually built before we can live in it”.

Living a life that will allow us to be the carpenters, the masons and bricklayers, laborers, laborer-supporters, financier, cleaners, workers of some sort involved and engaged sacrificially in building the house to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers, is the key to our spiritual growth. That engagement entails a life of service to the Cause, to the Divine Plan. The implications of this mindset are energizing to reflect on. Here are some of my thoughts:

**For Individuals:** is that they: Endeavor to live a coherent life in accordance with “The good pleasure of God” knowing that in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá “The will and plan of God is that each individual member of humankind shall become illumined like unto a lamp, ... leading his fellow creatures out of natural darkness into the heavenly light” (*Promulgation*). To “strive day and night to ... see themselves as instruments used to fulfill the vision of Bahá'u'lláh; determined to become that individual on whom, in the words of Shoghi Effendi “depends the fate of the entire community”; acting “as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe”; serving “as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and insure the stability of the administrative edifice” of Bahá'u'lláh. Supporting whole-heartedly, continuously and generously, the measure adopted and plans formulated by the institutions of the Faith”. And within this context, the individual attends to his or her personal, family, and social responsibilities knowing full well that the heart of the Guardian leaps with joy at every evidence testifying to the response of such souls and that “The unseen legions, standing rank upon rank, and [are] eager to pour forth from the Kingdom on high the full measure of their celestial strength” on such individuals. (*Citadel of the Faith*)

**Families:** “ are eager to learn how “...the married couples live as “true partners; [and] one is not subordinated to the other”; how with “adherence to the principle of the oneness of humanity” children are provided with experiences that guard them from prejudice of all kinds and enhance their appreciation of diversity”; how to contribute to the process of transformation in neighbourhoods and villages, and beyond? eager “... to examine the present practices in their societies, weigh them in light of the Teachings, weed out any undesirable tendencies, and learn to establish new patterns of family life suited to the needs of a new age” and therefore are “an integral part of the effort [to learn] about the release of the society-building power of the Faith in

ever greater measures” (*The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025*).

**Communities:** “define themselves by their commitment to the oneness of humanity” (*October 2019 addressed to All Those who come to Honor the Dawn of a New Day*), each trying to be each trying to be a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress... A comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; are intently engaged in executing the provisions” of the Divine Plan in their circumstances including “a greater involvement of the Bahá'í community in the life of society” (*28 November 2023*), all in an atmosphere where “[f]ear of failure finds no place, mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms” (*9 January 2001*).

**Institutions:** the force molding the institutions is generally the development of capacity to govern in servitude (*18 January 2019 – To the Bahá'ís of the World*). As such: The institutions recognize their sacred responsibility to remain “The channel of divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind,” (*October 1963 to the Followers of Baha'u'llah throughout the world*). They eagerly make efforts to “gain experience, particularly in the context of their efforts to ensure that the provisions of the global Plans are met, “... channeling individual and collective energies towards the transformation of society.” (*November 2012 to all National Spiritual Assemblies*). they become increasingly adept at offering assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance to appropriate initiatives; “appreciating the need for coordinated action channeled toward fruitful ends, aim not to control but to nurture and guide the individual (*2 March 2013*). They “facilitate creative and collaborative exchanges among all elements of the community and strive to build consensus, to overcome challenges, through various means, including the establishment of educational agencies, they help foster the spiritual and intellectual development of the believers” (*28 November 2023*)

In another word, every protagonist is shaped with the task of implementing the Divine Plan, the gift of Bahá'u'lláh to every one of us who desires to be engaged in fostering spiritual health. Shoghi Effendi, writing in 1938 about the prosecution of the first stage of the Divine Plan, stated:

“The potentialities with which an almighty Providence has endowed it [the Divine Plan] will no doubt enable its promoters to achieve their purpose. ... they who labour for the glory of the Most Great Name ... can best demonstrate to the visionless, faithless, and restless society to which they belong //their power to proffer a haven of refuge to its members in the hour of their realized doom.” (*This Decisive Hour, #42*)

The Nine-Year Plan is the commencement of the third epoch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan. Let us explore the ramifications of the Nine-Year Plan, the implementation of which is the best way for this generation to demonstrate to our visionless, faithless, and restless society our ability to offer a haven in its hour of need. The guidance of the institutions of the Faith constitutes the marching orders for all of us in implementing it. We have been blessed by having just received two new messages from the House of Justice. The Counsellors have been consulting on them in the Holy Land for many days. The insights and the guidance that they will

convey to us during the forthcoming institutional gatherings is the best gift we could ask for as we enter the second phase of the Plan. The few thoughts on the 9YP that I share here with you today are based on my personal reflections.

One is to remind ourselves of the importance and the urgency of fulfilling the goals of the Nine-Year Plan. The global Plan has specific objectives, as announced in the messages of the Supreme Body dated 30 December 2021 and Ridvan 2022. Based on the global Plan, Canada has developed a national plan and based on the national plan, every Bahá'í Council has a plan for its region. These regional plans indicate the level of progress to be achieved in each cluster within a given time. The responsibility of doing the actual work needed to achieve these goals rests on the shoulders of individuals and families. Thus, every devoted follower of Bahá'u'lláh has the bounty of serving the Divine Plan in her/his backyard. All those attracted to the vision of Bahá'u'lláh can contribute to the fulfilment of His vision in their own neighborhood. As for the urgency of achieving these goals, the House of Justice says it is of the utmost importance and urgency because:

“the followers of Bahá'u'lláh are engaged in a race against time. Mankind is being engulfed in the ruin precipitated by its own folly; the longer we Baha'is delay in achieving the tasks that God lays before us, the greater is the suffering of our fellow men”.

The House of Justice calls upon the believers to:

“consider the goals, //recognize that they are intended to be won, //decide what is needed to win them, //and then, //however hopeless the prospect may seem, //set out determinedly to do whatever is needed, confident that Bahá'u'lláh will reinforce them with His Hosts and will open the doors of victory before them.” (*The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated January 11, 1971 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany*).

The second thought is the need to reflect on how imperative it is to achieve these goals. The House of Justice tell us that “The progress of the Cause depends upon many factors” but

“if the Bahá'ís will but do their part—however unpromising the prospect—Bahá'u'lláh is able to open doors and change conditions in ways far beyond our understanding”.

What, then, are “those factors that are directly the result of the actions of the Bahá'ís”? The House of Justice says,

“The first [factor] is a greater realization of the power of Bahá'u'lláh to reinforce the efforts of those who serve Him ... and of the impotence of all our deeds without this divine assistance”.

Having this dynamic in our minds when we decide about nature and the magnitude of our services is so vital that the House of Justice says,

“Any evaluation of a situation is entirely misleading if it does not take this supreme power [of Divine assistance] into consideration; //whereas //constant consciousness of

dependence upon Him //enables the Bahá'ís to formulate audacious plans and confidently carry them through to completion in the face of seemingly insuperable obstacles”.

The House of Justice then says,

“Armed with this consciousness, the believers should then approach the winning of the goals of the Nine-Year Plan with the spirit that will achieve them”. (*The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated January 11, 1971 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany*).

So, acting sacrificially relying fully on the power of Divine assistance is what will guarantee success.

The third thought is difficult for me to share, but I am going to share it regardless, and it is this:

Many of the messages of the House of Justice cover the progress of the Plan globally. The House of Justice highlights the outstanding achievements of the clusters in areas that are in the forefront of learning, so as to assist us, in addition to the joy, to learn from and to understand how achievable the goals of the Plan are. It then, in the kindest and clearest language, also points to clusters where much more needs to be done. Consider the first paragraph of the recent message to the Counsellors, in which the House of Justice, first tells us about “a dramatic accomplishment” and “valuable experience ... gained” and then says “gratified as we are by the progress made, it is evident that a most formidable task lies ahead if each national Bahá'í community is to fulfil the aspirations for the movement of clusters that it set for itself when the Plan began”. Such reporting of course rejuvenates our spirit and empowers us for further achievement. Both situations -- where dramatic achievements have been made and where a most formidable task remains -- apply of course to a number of clusters in Canada and across British Columbia.

The thought I want to share with you is this: When, in a given cluster, a formidable task indeed remains to be done, we should not hesitate to share that fact clearly with friends and explore with them the implications of what needs to be done for everyone and every family. We must ensure that in the gatherings where we do this, there is adequate time to hear and enjoy the news of the “dramatic achievements” elsewhere and internalize the details of the formidable tasks to be undertaken in our own cluster. The poetic language calling on us to take strength from dramatic achievements elsewhere and to take more sacrificial action in our own clusters needs to be conveyed in a more accessible language so that the average Bahá'í can better relate it to his or her own circumstances.

I remember the story of a Bahá'í, not very familiar with high standards of Bahá'í writings, who participated in a pioneering conference where the speakers used the eloquent language of the writings to encourage the friends to arise to pioneer. Having enjoyed the spiritual and the enthusiastic atmosphere of the gathering, at the end he was not sure of the implications of what had been talked about for himself and his family. He approached one of the speakers and asked what the essence was of what he needed to take home from this conference. The speaker, touched by the sincerity of this devoted servant of Bahá'u'lláh said that he should go home and consult to see if he could leave his current home soon and settle in a new place that needed pioneers. The believer immediately replied, asking why the speaker had not said this right away in the morning? Adding that “I am eager to go, but I did not know that the call is actually addressed to me”. I am not at all suggesting that this generally happens in Canada and that we do not state

clearly at the cluster level the formidable task to be done. but I am saying that it may happen out of kindness of heart, out of fear or concern that friends may get anxious, nervous, or discouraged if they hear that a formidable task still lies ahead.

God forbid! The friends know that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has reached its current level of strength and progress through the voluntary, sacrificial services of generations of His loved ones. They recognize that achieving the Nine-Year Plan's goals is a formidable task, as emphasized by their much-loved Universal House of Justice, and understand that after prayer, persistent action is essential. They know full well that only in accordance with the principles of sacrificial action and with reliance on the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, “both material and spiritual happiness shall become realized”. (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*). We need to speak about the formidable task in a language that encourages all of us not to think in a third person vocabulary. It should assist us to go home, reflect and say, there is a formidable task to be done in my cluster; it is my spiritual obligation to do more; how can I, with the help of divine assistance. re-design my life for this so that I can do it.

Having shared these thoughts with you, I now want to talk about how each of the protagonists of the Plan could be taking advantage of this spiritually charged period as we enter the next phase of the Plan. Individuals and families can reflect and arrive at a resolution about the form, shape, and the focus of their current and future services, taking inspiration from this statement of the House of Justice in its message dated 31 December 2025 that:

“Whatever form a person’s service takes, it emerges from the unique interaction between, on the one hand, the needs of the Faith and, on the other, the possibilities afforded by the circumstances of each individual and the sacrifices that he or she chooses to make”.

Questions such as the following can be discussed at home and elsewhere:

1. What has been, thus far, my role in the progress of the Nine Year Plan in my cluster, given that the House of Justice tells us that the situation of the world “demands from every conscientious soul a response” and that “[t]he methods and instruments of the Plan allow every soul to contribute a share of what humanity needs in this day”?
2. What should my response be to the call of the Universal House of Justice saying, “There is an urgent need to cultivate more broadly the capacities that are required to intensify a program of growth”?
3. How can I intensify my role, knowing that the Supreme Body is calling for “a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work”?
4. How systematic have I been in applying the provisions of the Plan creatively and intelligently?
5. Do we, as individuals and as families, have our own teaching plans?
6. How central do I consider the role of the training institute to be in a sustained program of growth in my cluster?
7. How do I support the strengthening of the training institute at the cluster level?
8. Do we take part in group efforts aimed at promoting family development, at improving life for ourselves and our wider family?

9. Have I made adequate provisions to support the plans and the undertakings of the institutions of the Faith, financially and otherwise?

In turn, the cluster agencies will also have their own reflections on the words of the House of Justice that:

None of the accomplishments of the individual [family] or the community could be sustained without the guidance, encouragement and support of the third participant in the Plan—the institutions of the Faith. (*27 December 2015*)

The nature of these supports will vary from one individual, family to another. Are there clarity and certainty about the nature of the support needed? How do cluster agencies provide effective “guidance, encouragement and support” that will make the accomplishments of the friends sustainable? What are some of institutional capacities needed at the cluster level to render this support effectively? And knowing that such capacities do not develop all at once and being mindful that a systematic approach is the safest and the quickest way of building them, what is the plan and what are the strategies for accomplishing this?

To approach the issue systematically, the question becomes: What is the most fundamental work undertaken by friends in the cluster? In the words of the House of Justice:

... At the core of the program must lie a sound and steady process of expansion matched by an equally strong process of human resource development.

With respect to this fact, the House of Justice explains that in the process of expansion:

“A range of teaching efforts needs to be carried out, involving both activities undertaken by the individual and campaigns promoted by the institutions. (*Turning Point*)

How do the cluster agencies encourage and empower individuals and families to formulate and implement their own teaching plans? If everyone in a population of, for example, 200 Bahá'ís in a cluster is going to have his or her own individual teaching plan, can the cluster agencies deliver support to everyone at once? If not, what is the process that will build this capacity organically – supporting, for example, the first 10 Bahá'ís and families and gradually increasing it to support 20, 50, and ultimately all 200 believers?

How efficient have the cycles of growth in a cluster been thus far, in terms of participation and in terms of results? What capacities must individuals and families acquire to function effectively in a cyclic way? Do the believers serving as nuclei find it easier to support the cycles of growth organized by the cluster agencies? How easy will it be for the community to develop this collective capacity without an adequate number of individuals and families acquiring it? What are the capacities needed by cluster agencies to organize these cycles with more efficiency?

How far has the community progressed in its outward-looking orientation, which is an element of growth? What can be done easily in this regard? What is the way, for example, to assist the community to begin learning how to organically, systematically, but also rapidly celebrate Bahá'í Holy Days as occasions that an ever-increasing number of inhabitants of the cluster feel part of?

With the training institute being the engine for growth and “...an element essential to the growth of the Faith” (*Turning Point*), strengthening it at the cluster level would without doubt be a vital means of support to the friends. The House of Justice notes:

Conscious of the profound implications the institute process holds for the advancement of peoples, they [i.e., the Institutions of the Faith] are paying particular attention to how the training institute can be strengthened. (Ridván 2018)

Strengthening the training institute is an ongoing task. What does this mean and entail for each cluster at any one time? We know that regularity and consistency are key to its accomplishment. The multiplicity of tasks to be carried out in a cluster cannot be allowed to neglect or slow down the systematic and gradual strengthening of this indispensable instrument for growth. Identifying and implementing 2–3 simple steps each year aimed at strengthening the training institute at the cluster level should, in my opinion, become an essential annual undertaking in every cluster.

Another means of support, especially for clusters at milestone 3, is facilitating the process of collective learning to steadily become more systematic, as described by the House of Justice. Success in this will help to create a shift from anxiety about numbers into a commitment to capacity building and action in a posture of learning, which is the base for rapid growth. The message of the House of Justice dated 31 December 2025 dwells on the significance of learning, noting that “pursuing the Plan with ... a dedication to the process of learning ... is the surest foundation for the progress that needs to be made in the Plan’s second phase”. As you know, learning takes place at different levels, but the Supreme Body emphasizes the indispensability of capacity for learning at the cluster level, saying “progress depends on the growth in capacity and understanding of the friends at the grassroots.” Identifying and implementing 2-3 small steps each year to put the learning process at a stronger footing is an approach for many clusters to benefit from.

The task of guiding the process of growth at the cluster level is another crucial element of growth. The House of Justice says:

“In every cluster the institutions and agencies //guiding the process – the Auxiliary Board members and the institute, together with the Area Teaching Committee – //need to examine the dynamics of growth on a regular basis and analyze the way in which these elements are working together, in order to identify gaps and determine what adjustments should be made.”. (April 2007).

The emphasis here is on regularly examining the dynamics of growth and analyzing the way elements of growth work in order “to identify gaps and determine what adjustments should be made.” The House of Justice also advises us that “... the Plan’s gradual unfoldment at the level of the cluster is a dynamic process, one that is necessarily complex and does not lend itself to ready simplification”. You would no doubt agree that any complex undertaking requires steady guiding and regular analysis if sound progress is to continue. With conditions varying from cluster to cluster, building capacity at the grassroots in each cluster is no doubt among the most urgent requirements. You also agree that this process cannot be interrupted, even, in my opinion,

when not all the three agencies in the cluster exist or function well. Each cluster would benefit reflecting on questions such as: Does such space exist and function regularly in the cluster? What are the elements of growth referred to in the statement of the House of Justice? Many clusters may already have an arrangement for guiding the process of growth. How can the efficiency of it be improved? The guiding of the process will, among other things, entail collection and analysis of statistics. How frequently are statistics collected and analyzed? Do capacities exist at the cluster level to identify gaps and determine the adjustments that can be made? Are statistics currently used to learn about any possible pattern of participation by families or groups of families?

Effective methods for systematically addressing all six types of support I have mentioned today need to be determined and applied at the cluster with a commitment to ongoing learning. One such approach could be the development and use of simple “tools” or “instruments” for each of them.

One more form of support that the cluster agencies may wish to provide if they have not done so already is to bring about more clarity to the friends about the various “dimensions of the community-building” that are occurring within their cluster. By doing so, guiding the whole growth process will become easier and more systematic. Today, based on my understanding of the guidance of the House of Justice, there are in each cluster, one or more of the four “dimensions of the community-building” (From letters of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 30 December 2021 and 30 October 2022). These are:

1. Work in the neighborhoods of focus.
2. Work by the generality of believers wherever they reside in the cluster, either as part of a nucleus of friends or in their own personal and family teaching efforts.
3. Work with receptive population(s) scattered in the cluster.
4. Work spearheaded by the youth.

Highlighting these, the House of Justice also advises that:

- The processes of learning along each of these lines require the capacity to apply imaginatively the elements of the Plan’s framework for action.
- Progress also demands the emergence of groups of individuals and families dedicated to such aspects of the work.
- Effective arrangements to offer these friends ongoing support is also vital.

Cluster agencies can see if groups of individuals and families dedicated to each of these aspects of the work are in place and if so, do they have easy access to a brief yet comprehensive compilation of the guidance of the House of Justice relevant to the dimensions of growth in which they are engaged. How regular is the rhythm of study, action, reflection in each of these dimensions? How does the process of learning along each of these lines look like? How is learning from other but similar areas taking place? Is the collected data in the cluster sufficient to enable adequate analysis of each dimension of community building separately, if needed?

Dear Friends, as we all prepare to enter the second phase of the Nine-Year Plan, and as we re-design our lives to be more effective protagonists of the Plan fostering spiritual growth, We can get inspiration from this statement of the House of Justice in its recent letter to the Counsellors' conference saying:

Looking back over one's life, there can be no greater joy and comfort than to know that it was spent in acute awareness of the divine remedy, that no effort was spared to proffer that remedy to receptive souls, and that during those fleeting years when opportunity was at hand, even in the midst of difficulties, every chance was seized to respond to humanity's intense need. *(31 December 2025)*

Let us also recall the sentiments the Supreme Body expressed in its letter of 30 December 2021 announcing the Nine-Year Plan, when it said:

How immensely blessed are those souls who, alive to the greatness of this Day and the significance of their actions, strive for the emergence of a society shaped by divine teachings.

Thank you for your attention. Have a wonderful day.