

CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
To the delegates attending the Tenth International Bahá'í Convention	2
London, <i>United Kingdom</i>	5
Norte del Cauca, <i>Colombia</i>	15
Bihar Sharif, <i>India</i>	25
Tiriki West, <i>Kenya</i>	35
South Tarawa, <i>Kiribati</i>	45
Acceleration of Learning	55

To the delegates attending the Tenth International Bahá'í Convention

In just a few years, the intensive programme of growth has emerged as a powerful means for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith on a large scale. Leading the process of learning that impels progress are scores of clusters where the friends have, through painstaking, systematic effort, come to understand how best to implement the cycles of activity that constitute such a programme. So instructive is the experience of these clusters, we asked the International Teaching Centre to choose one example from each continent and prepare a document that would demonstrate at once the diversity of conditions in which the believers everywhere are labouring and the coherent vision that unites them as they advance the process of entry by troops. The document consists of five case studies and a closing analysis. It is inspiring indeed, and we commend it to your study.

While the case studies offer an impressive account of the activity in each cluster, you will, we hope, not be content only to read the narrative but will try to identify the principles, qualities, and approaches that have made possible the progress achieved. What should become clear to you is how aptly the friends and institutions in the clusters have managed to exploit the framework for action referred to in our 27 December 2005 message to breathe the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation into places as diverse as the crowded city of London and the tiny island group of Kiribati.

Immediately apparent from the description of all five clusters is the degree to which the friends have relied on the power of divine assistance; this has fortified them in the field of action and enabled them to persevere in the face of inevitable difficulties. Equally evident is the sense of purpose that animates their endeavours—a purpose complemented by the attitude of learning they have espoused. Even more striking, however, is the way these attributes are perpetuated in the body of believers as it grows in size, for in all cases they have come to characterize not only individual action but also the community's as a whole. So focused is the collective energy of the friends as they carry out the central tasks of the Five Year Plan, whether in taking individual initiative or participating in organized campaigns, that they are catching the first glimpses of what it means for their powers to be multiplied in unified action.

In reading the case studies, you will note how the approaches adopted and the system of administration employed serve as means for facilitating the dynamics of such unified action. In every cluster, fellowship and support are the watchwords in this respect. Whether they are paying a visit to a family's home to draw them into a conversation about the Faith or helping one another to perform acts of service as part of their study of the institute courses, it is the joy of accompanying other souls on their spiritual journey that motivates the believers.

This same motivating force guides the institutions and agencies operating in the cluster in their efforts to administer the intensive programme of growth. Clearly the complexity of the coordination schemes in the five clusters varies to some extent. Yet, irrespective of the level of complexity, the administrative mechanisms in place represent a response to the desire of an increasing number of friends who are eager to express the ardour of their faith in action; these provide them with the support needed to participate in teaching teams, to host devotional meetings, to conduct children's classes, to form junior youth groups, and to establish study circles. That the institutions and agencies involved are able to maintain such a responsive form of administration testifies to the high degree of organizational skill and flexibility they have attained.

In the closing analysis, the International Teaching Centre examines the strategies being employed to transfer the experience gained in advanced clusters, such as the five described here, to those in earlier stages of growth. The effect of such transference has been remarkable. What sometimes required several years for the friends in one cluster to accomplish can now be learned in another in a relatively short span of time. Often within a matter of months, as pointed out by the Teaching Centre, a dynamic pattern of activity, reflecting the equal emphasis placed on the twin processes of expansion and consolidation, can be established. Invariably, the believers take immediate ownership for the programme of growth, and unity of thought is soon reached. As they begin to put into practice what they have learned through the study of institute courses, especially related to direct teaching methods, they see their efforts confirmed and preconceived notions about the lack of receptivity fall away. Their commitment to the process of growth is raised to higher and higher levels as they are drawn into decision making at the reflection meeting. Plans laid down by the institutions and agencies serving the cluster become increasingly effective as their ability to interpret the experience acquired by the friends is gradually sharpened. They are able to think strategically, to set priorities, and to use resources judiciously. Moreover, they identify believers capable of shouldering added responsibilities in pursuit of plans and channel the energies of growing numbers in service to the Cause. The community thrives as it lovingly embraces new believers. In short, the process of capacity building in the three protagonists of the Plan accelerates at a tremendous rate. It is this development that heartens us most and which gives us confidence that the potential of the Five Year Plan will be realized.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
Ridván 2008



UNDERGROUND

Teaching
Children's Classes
Grade 1

London

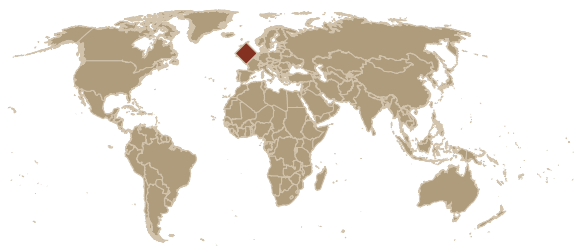
United Kingdom

The experience of the London cluster is a lesson in mobilizing teaching teams and transforming attitudes to the expansion of the Cause in what was deemed an “unreceptive” area.

Like many other large cities, London had long been seen as a place where it was especially difficult to teach—in spite of the fact that a direct teaching project undertaken in the Hackney borough between 1992 and 1997 clearly showed heightened receptivity among the Afro-Caribbean, Turkish, and Kurdish populations. Unfortunately, the project lacked adequate means to deepen newly enrolled believers and build community life. Without enough active teachers and effective strategies, only a handful of the significant numbers of individuals and families that entered the Cause developed a strong Bahá’í identity.

In 2001, at the outset of the Five Year Plan, London was divided into seven clusters. One that showed particular promise for growth was London City East, which included the site of the Hackney project. Following consultations with the Counsellors, the institutions and agencies there decided to address the deficiencies of the earlier teaching project by taking a campaign-like approach to raising up human resources and by making specific plans that would allow every willing individual to join a study group and progress rapidly through the sequence of institute courses. In that way, new believers would immediately assume a sense of responsibility for the progress of the Faith and would themselves arise to become active teachers.

When this approach was presented at a reflection meeting, the idea of an intensified effort met



Cluster at a Glance

- Area 1,610 square kilometres
- Largest city in western Europe: population 7.5 million
- Over 40 percent of inhabitants belong to “minority” groups, especially Africans, Caribbeans, and Indians
- City divided into 33 boroughs (local municipalities)
- Bahá’í community numbers around 1,000 with a high proportion of friends from Iranian background
- Local Spiritual Assemblies in 29 boroughs
- Second intensive programme of growth in Europe (April 2005)
- First Bahá’í in London was Mary Virginia Thornburgh-Cropper, a member of the first Western pilgrim group in 1898
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited in 1911 and again in 1912–13
- Site of the resting place of Shoghi Effendi



with a strong positive response. Within a few months, a company of some 30 believers, many of them young people, had successfully engaged friends of the Faith in neighbourhood children's classes, devotional meetings, and home visits. This experience led the way for other clusters in London where the believers were beginning to see the transforming effect of the institute process on the work of expansion and consolidation.

Preparing and Launching the Intensive Programme of Growth

In early 2005, the decision was taken to amalgamate London's seven clusters into one, the combined resources of which now made launching an intensive programme of growth possible. The focus of the new Greater London cluster's first reflection meeting, held in preparation for the programme's launch, was twofold: to carry out a campaign of home visits and to identify potentially receptive friends, family members, neighbours, and co-workers. The ground-work that was laid in this preparatory period proved critical to the success of the programme's early cycles.

Only weeks before the launch of the intensive programme of growth, a cluster-level scheme of coordination was established. The Bahá'í Council for England, in consultation with the Counsellors, appointed an Area Teaching Committee, consisting of five friends with experience in the institute process. A cluster institute coordinator was then named, as was the first children's class coordinator for the cluster.

Time was short, and much work lay ahead. To begin the programme, friends who had completed institute courses would need to be strategically mobilized. There had been some experience with seekers in core activities in the past but not on the scale required. Would efforts to mobilize the friends in the intensive programme of growth meet with success? The excitement felt by members of the Area Teaching Committee was mixed with considerable anxiety—feelings heightened by the knowledge that theirs was only the second programme of growth in all of western Europe. There would be no examples to follow along the way.

The results of the first cycle of activity far exceeded expectations. More than 150 believers participated in some way in the expansion phase, a noteworthy accomplishment, given how few had previously considered themselves teachers of the Cause. The confidence of the friends was greatly boosted, and the spirit at the well-attended reflection meeting was elevated, determined, and galvanic.

The objective of the institutions and agencies serving in the cluster had been to increase substantially the number of seekers involved in core activities, to learn about teaching, and to witness some growth. The number of the friends of the Faith engaged in core activities rose dramatically from 40 to 133, and six enrolled as Bahá'ís. Without doubt, the possibilities for growth were significantly greater than anticipated. But beyond the measurable results, it was clear that the friends were becoming increasingly audacious in reaching out to people, using the tools acquired from the training institute courses such as home visits and teaching teams to shape their endeavours. As the account of their victories reverberated in far off lands, the friends in London were further confirmed in their efforts.

Learning about Teaching Teams

From the outset of the intensive programme of growth in London, teaching teams have played a pivotal role in propelling the process. In general, teams have focused on inviting people to core activities, which, of course, has involved them in sharing the Message, to a greater or lesser extent in each case. Much work was undertaken to prepare the initial teams for the first cycle of activity in order to ensure success.

Like military strategists mobilizing an army, the cluster agencies with the assistance of the Auxiliary Board members began by looking at the list of believers participating in the institute process, especially those who had completed Ruhi Institute Books 6 and 7, and by identifying groups of friends living reasonably close to one another who could form three- or four-member teams. A potential coordinator for each team was contacted and asked about possible members, and through such a process of consultation the first teams emerged. The role of the team coordinators would later prove essential for ensuring the flow of information, advice, resources, and encouragement between the large numbers operating on the ground and the cluster agencies—a flow imperative for this army of intoxicated lovers of Bahá'u'lláh to function properly.

A simple outline of what teaching teams would actually do was produced and studied, first with the team coordinators and then with all members. The Auxiliary Board members took the lead in this work, and because there was little experience operating in teaching teams and only limited experience with individual teaching, these concepts had to be carefully examined. The materials aimed at underscoring one point above all else: the expansion phase was a time to teach, and to teach with an intensity beyond any previous efforts. Of the 30 teams formed in the first cycle, perhaps 12 were effective in engaging their contacts in core activities. Though concerned about the less effective teams, the Area Teaching Committee was advised to be confident that the learning from the most active ones would soon spread to others—an approach that has been proven by the consistent increase in the number of effective teams from cycle to cycle.

The stories from the teams during the first week—of overcoming fears, making successful home visits to share prayers, teaching in small firesides,



inviting colleagues to devotional meetings—reinforced many of the ideas they had studied earlier and strengthened their appreciation for the new mode of working. Excitement was palpable. Inspiring stories were collected and shared to encourage others. They were also used in later cycles to advance the friends’ understanding through reflection on real experiences.

Confidence to teach the Faith to people the believers already knew was a key attitudinal change that occurred in the early stages of the programme and developed into new, more effective, habits over subsequent cycles. Many believers initially felt inhibited, assuming that people in their immediate circles would not be receptive. Through experience, however, teachers saw that when they presented the Faith in a natural way, their friends, family members, neighbours, and co-workers responded positively with remarkable consistency.

As the teams entered the field of action, they experienced the immediate power of prayer and began to rely on it increasingly—a habit that has been strongly encouraged by the institutions, as a means both for attracting divine assistance and for keeping in the forefront the immensely exalted and spiritual nature of the enterprise. The plan for each cycle of activity continues to include a special prayer campaign in which all are invited to take part.

With up to 50 teams spread across more than 30 communities in London, it has been a challenge for the cluster agencies to keep in touch with them to support their efforts. Yet the ability to work shoulder to shoulder with the teams has gradually increased throughout the cycles, as the Area Teaching Committee members have acquired personal experience and have themselves become more confident in their approach to accompanying the friends in their efforts. Likewise, the teams’ skills and understanding have also developed as they have gained experience in the field. By the end of the sixth cycle, there was a strong culture of inviting friends to Book 1 without hesitation.

Study Circles as Environments for Teaching

As in other places, study circles have offered a fertile environment for teaching, but this potential has only gradually been realized as the friends have overcome inhibitions to teach. Experience has demonstrated that many barriers are removed by studying Book 6. Several friends have even remarked that their

habits of thought were so ingrained that they did not shed their inhibitions to share the Message until they had served as tutors of the book a few times.

Further, some tutors have managed to establish a pattern of growth based on the courses of the institute. These believers form study circles and assist the seekers after the completion of each course to carry out the relevant core activity with a growing network of friends of the Faith. By accompanying participants in this way through the study and practice of Books 1 to 7, they are able to systematically multiply the number of those who have the capacity to help others become dynamic teachers of the Cause. The story of one tutor illustrates the kind of transformation that can occur.

Vida facilitated her first study circle as the result of the efforts of a teaching team member who was not yet enrolled in the Faith. The team member arranged a daytime study circle for eight mothers, only two of whom were Bahá'ís, offering to take care of the children while Vida facilitated. Quite nervous at the start, with the new participants looking at her expectantly, Vida later confessed, "I could hear my own heart beating." Despite her nervousness, the first sessions went well; the participants were enthusiastic and her confidence quickly began to build. Through her own efforts and those of the Auxiliary Board member and the cluster coordinators who accompanied her in the field, Vida's skills developed markedly. From her first study circle with mothers, a children's class naturally emerged. Several participants were nurtured and embraced the Faith through home visits, firesides, and devotional gatherings. Other teaching opportunities opened up as these individuals began to move through the sequence of courses and, in turn, to teach the Faith, so that a pattern of growth has now emerged. Two years later, Vida is serving as a resource person—even travelling to other countries where the believers struggle with certain tasks related to growth, accompanying the friends in making home visits and helping them to confirm souls in the Cause. And the original teaching team member formally enrolled in the Faith in the seventh cycle!

Glimpses of Growth

As a result of the efforts exerted by the believers in the London cluster, the tempo of teaching is steadily gathering momentum. The table below provides relevant statistical information from the first through the eighth cycle of activity, which concluded in January 2008.

CYCLE	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	5TH	6TH	7TH	8TH
No. involved in teaching activities	156	106	147	115	129	143	114	75
No. youth and adults enrolled during cycle	10	9	10	6	8	11	10	8
Total no. individuals enrolled during cycle	12	12	12	6	9	12	10	8
No. new believers entered in institute programme	10	7	7	3	6	11	10	8
No. seekers in core activities at end of cycle	133	124	120	128	150	140	180	131

It is noteworthy that 86 per cent of the youth and adult new believers have entered the training institute process, and nearly half of these are active in the teaching field. Several became members of teaching teams straight away—in a few cases before they formally declared—and are regarded as some of the most natural teachers. Without old habits or attitudes to discard, they see training as an opportunity to gain skills to effectively share the Message they have embraced, and so they respond with eagerness to invitations to undertake

further study of the institute courses. On occasion, they even recall fondly the cycle of activity during which they joined the Faith!

Decentralizing Children's Classes

Before the launch of the intensive programme of growth, many of the children from Bahá'í families in London attended one of the weekly centralized "community schools" held in three localities, to which parents living outside the city brought their children as well. Only one or two children from families where the parents were not Bahá'ís attended these schools. Following a decision of the National Spiritual Assembly, such schools were closed so that resources could be focused on initiating neighbourhood classes that would be open to all.

It has been a slow and sometimes difficult process of transition to a culture that places importance on extending Bahá'í education to children of all backgrounds. Yet, with experience, the value of neighbourhood classes has become more and more apparent, and as the following story shows, the children from Bahá'í families are not only developing a strong Bahá'í identity through the classes but are also becoming agents of growth in a completely natural way.

Florence and Abigail The openness of children and their natural ability to teach became clear when Florence, one of the Bahá'í children, said to her friend, "We have no school tomorrow, because it's a Holy Day." Her friend, an eager participant in Bahá'í children's classes, told her mother that she, too, would like to observe the Holy Day. Puzzled, the mother called the children's class teacher, who explained that the Bahá'í children had permission to stay home from school on this sacred anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, a Manifestation of God. The mother, who was not a believer or participant in any core activity, then called the school and gave permission for her daughter to take the Holy Day off, too. Mother and daughter attended the Holy Day commemoration, and the child continues to be one of the most enthusiastic children in the class, firmly identifying herself as a Bahá'í.

Abigail, a six-year-old who was also attending Bahá'í children's classes, decided to conduct a devotional meeting at home for her parents. She invited them to sit on cushions she had prepared, and she played some music. When Daddy began to read his prayer too soon, she explained that they must read their prayers in turn, with a pause between each one. Abigail's mother, who was studying Book 1, was very touched by this experience with her daughter and soon after declared her faith.

One young mother who was appointed as a children's class coordinator during the fifth cycle gained a good deal of experience in inviting neighbourhood children to her classes and in taking their parents through the sequence of institute courses. She has seen the evolution in the friends' understanding of the nature of Bahá'í children's classes and their place in a process of growth. At first, conversations among Bahá'ís tended to revolve around whether it was prudent to stop operating the centralized Bahá'í Sunday school. Then, with the focus on working locally, conversations shifted to learning how to invite children to classes and what to say to their parents. From there, consultations moved on to the highly practical question of how to work with the many children who were attending the classes. How to invite the parents to core activities was the next stage. The question most pressing before the friends at this



point is how to invite the receptive souls from among the parents to formally enrol as Bahá'ís. The story of one mother's efforts illustrates the tremendous possibilities that open to those who step forward to teach children.

Julia started a regular children's class with her daughter's friends, whose mothers were also learning about the Faith from her, and gradually acquired the capacity to conduct classes themselves, overcoming obstacles as they arose. One of the most welcome challenges was learning how to invite her study circle participants to enrol in the Faith. She tells the story of one such experience:

"My friend and I got together after the first session of the Book 1 study circle. She had some questions and as we consulted about them, she seemed to be trying to articulate something. 'What makes us different? How is it that you are a Bahá'í and . . . and I'm not a Bahá'í? What is the difference between you and me?' I responded that I understood a Bahá'í to be someone who accepts that Bahá'u'lláh has God's Message for today, and that being a Bahá'í is a realization that comes to our heart. At some point we realize that we believe. She responded, 'But I do believe that. I realized it almost the first time we spoke of it together.'

Julia has accompanied several of these mothers through Book 3 and beyond. They are now Bahá'ís, conducting children's classes and vigorously contributing to the process of growth.

Of the 15 children's classes in London, 13 include children from families that are not Bahá'ís—and those involved are engaged in an intense process of learning. As experience accumulates in forming junior youth groups, the coordinators for children's classes and junior youth groups are finding that working together ensures that these two core activities reinforce one another.

Looking Forward

Eight cycles, spanning two and a half years, have seen the enrolment of 81 new believers in London. The effect of this accomplishment on the members of the teaching teams, most of whom had no previous experience with their friends and families becoming Bahá'ís, has been profound. Yet, even with intense prayer and effort, it is not proving easy to accelerate further the rate of enrolments in London. A number of important challenges must now be met: raising the number of effective teachers; ensuring that teaching in the expansion phase reaches the necessary level of intensity; supporting the work of the teams adequately; and, above all, enhancing the ability to identify segments of the general population with heightened receptivity to Bahá'u'lláh's Message.

Until now the teaching teams have principally reinforced individual initiatives—albeit on an increasingly larger scale. The next frontier of learning is collective action in the teaching field. In the eighth cycle, the introduction of a special teaching effort aimed at receptive populations in selected neighbourhoods, engaging a few of the most audacious and experienced teams with a higher level of organization, coordination, and intensity of action, has opened up new prospects for growth.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited London in 1911, He told the friends that it was the attractive force of their love that had drawn Him to that city. Furthermore, He said, "In the world of existence there is no more powerful magnet than the magnet of love."¹ Today, as the believers in London strive to share the Divine Message with the diverse souls who now make up that city, they are conscious that their success is directly related to the increasing ardour of their all-encompassing love for their fellow citizens, who come from almost every



conceivable background. Deep in the hearts and minds of the friends resonate the Master's words about the diversity he found among the Bahá'ís in London: "You are all, of every race and creed, members of one family. The teaching of Bahá'u'lláh constrains you to realize your brotherhood to one another."² Yet they know, too, that goodwill is not enough for 'Abdu'l-Bahá also advised them, "These meetings here in London are good, the knowledge and the intention are good, but how can there be a result without action?"³ It is through their unflagging efforts in the Plan's framework for action that the friends in this cluster have found effective instruments to convey their ever-growing measure of love for humankind.



- 1 *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987) p. 79.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 54.