

# Institute Training Programs

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## Introduction

As more and more national Baha'i communities begin to approach their teaching activities in a systematic fashion to initiate or revitalize the process of entry by troops, attention is being directed toward fostering an institute process within each country or region in order to develop the human resources required to sustain and accelerate the growth of the Faith.

The concept of a teaching institute has evolved over many years through experience and consultation. The purpose of this document is to explore the current understanding of the concept and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the development of human resources.

## 1. A Historical Perspective

### Systematic Preparation of Teachers

From the earliest stages of the advancement of the Cause, the Central Figures called for systematic approaches to the teaching work and the training of teachers. For example, Baha'u'llah stated that "the teaching of the Cause of God should be considered with a view to what, in the particular conditions of each time and age, is most conducive to its advancement and. . . whatever is then decided upon should be carried into effect."<sup>1</sup> And among His many exhortations about teaching, 'Abdu'l-Baha encouraged the friends to follow the example of a distinguished Persian believer who established a class for the training of Baha'i teachers:

The eminent Sadru's-Sudur, who hath verily attained a most exalted station in the Retreats of Bliss, inaugurated the teaching meeting. He was the first blessed soul to lay the foundation of this momentous institution. God be praised, during the course of his life he educated persons who today are strong and eloquent advocates of the Lord God, disciples who are indeed pure and spiritual descendants of him who was so close to the Holy Threshold. After his passing, certain blessed individuals took steps to perpetuate his teaching work, and when He learned of it, this Captive's heart rejoiced.

At this time, likewise, I most urgently request the friends of God to make every effort, as much as lieth within their competence, along these lines.<sup>2</sup>

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## **A New Phase in the Progress of the Cause**

With the success of new teaching methods aimed at reaching the masses of humanity in the Nine Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice observed that the Faith had "entered a new phase in its development and establishment throughout the world."<sup>3</sup> The achievement of progress called for "new methods"<sup>4</sup> and "experiments"<sup>5</sup> in the teaching field which were to be guided by experience and the consultation of the believers. One approach that proved to be fruitful was the establishment of teaching institutes, which the House of Justice promoted as a means for preparing individuals for participation in expansion and consolidation activities:

In view of the urgent needs of consolidation to areas where teaching the masses is taking place, it is important that whatever the Nine Year Plan calls for the establishment of a Teaching Institute, immediate steps be taken by the responsible National Spiritual Assembly to acquire the properties and establish the Institutes. We feel this goal of the Plan should take priority over your property goals in view of the urgent need to utilize these Teaching Institutes as focal centers for the deepening of the spiritual lives of the believers, the enrichment of their understanding of the Faith and its teachings, and the training of an adequate number of teachers who could in turn arise to share the knowledge and spirit they have acquired with others, and help in consolidating the foundations of the Cause in their countries.<sup>6</sup>

### **Support for Large-Scale Expansion and Consolidation**

During the Six Year Plan, the International Teaching Centre began a dialogue with Counsellors worldwide through a series of letters designed to explore various aspects of large-scale expansion and consolidation, including the formation of institutes.

It is our hope that our constant contact with each one of you will enable us to gather your insights and build, from your experience, a body of practical knowledge that can be shared with the institutions and the friends, everywhere. We hope that during the coming months we can consult with you on topics that are important for the continued success of our teaching endeavors. The purpose of this letter is to begin consultation on one such topic, namely the use of institutes in the deepening of the friends, especially in areas with large numbers of enrollments.

Our concern with institutes arises from repeated observations that unless the number of teachers increases constantly and keeps pace with rapid expansion, it becomes almost impossible to carry out the necessary deepening of the new believers or to ensure sustained efforts for the expansion of the Faith. Teaching Institutes, when freed from certain misconceptions and managed

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creatively with a spirit of love and sacrifice, prove to be valuable instruments for the continuous training of the human resources so urgently needed for rapid expansion and for subsequent deepening and consolidation. As we examine the patterns of organization of Institutes in different countries we can identify a number of ideas that may be helpful to you in your deliberations on the subject. It is our hope that as a result of your consultations you may be able to share with us a plan for the development of institutes in countries and regions of your continents where the need is already great....

. . . In every country, numerous people are needed to hold children's classes, to visit families in the villages and towns for deepening, to help in the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies and, especially, to participate in campaigns for the expansion of the Faith. Where are these resources to come from, if not from amongst the new believers themselves? And how are they to perform these tasks if they are not trained through systematic deepening programs? It is natural that the development of human resources should take on a different meaning in the Faith from what is usually implied by theories based on a narrow purpose of training for specific tasks. Training in a Baha'i institute is to occur in the context of a process of spiritual enrichment that seeks the development of spiritual qualities and the attainment of true understanding. But, experience clearly shows that it is not enough simply to make regular appeals to the friends to arise and serve the Faith, particularly in mass-tought areas where they have little confidence in themselves need to be nurtured along a path of service to the Faith. The development human resources for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith cannot be left to chance, must be taken into account in national plans everywhere.<sup>7</sup>

The Universal House of Justice noted the contribution of this exchange to the enhancement of the progress of the teaching work in its Ridvan 1990 message:

Nor have the Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre been slow in responding to opportunities to foster the climate of progress now evident in all quarters of the globe, Through the unified vision of growth to which they have called the Continental Boards of Counsellors and their able, hardworking and self-sacrificing auxiliaries, a new vitality can be felt in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the world. The Continental Counsellors deserve the deep gratitude of the entire Baha'i community as they approach the close of their current five-year term, distinguished for their outstanding services.<sup>8</sup>

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## 2. The Nature and Purpose of Institute Training Programs

A number of issues Concerning the nature and purpose of institutes have been progressively clarified through the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. Experience, enriched through the consultation prompted by the International Teaching Centre, has produced additional insights for considerations.

### **The Use of the Term "Institute"**

The word "institute" is often used in the Baha'i world when referring to a building used for deepening activities or to a gathering for deepening, often held for a specific period or dealing with particular topics--such as a "nine-day" or "weekend institute." The concept of an institute explored in this paper refers to an evolving program for the development of human resources.

Part of such a program may, itself, be held in a specific building or may include one or more deepening courses that are held for a fixed, short period. However, an institute refers to the entire range of activities necessary to carry forward an ever more effective program of human-resource development---including curriculum design, teacher preparation, administration, evaluation and revision of the courses, and coordination of the activities of the institute with the teaching plans of Assemblies and committees.

The Universal House of Justice has stated; "We have always stressed to those National Spiritual Assemblies which establish Teaching Institutes that at the present time such an institute is a function and not necessarily a building and there are many places where such educational work can be pursued if a number of teachers can be supported."<sup>9</sup>

### **The "Institute Process"**

The term "institute process" is used to capture the sense of an endeavor that evolves-learning by experience how to develop human resources. "The desire of a few individuals to become a core group who study, pray and act together for the purpose of reaching populations to invite them into the Cause of God, is the foundation of the institute concept."<sup>10</sup> The process unfolds as the group strives to deepen and train receptive members of the population; actions and materials are revised based on their effectiveness, eventually a progressively unfolding plan of action emerges. This continual learning process is the central driving force of the institute's program.

"Mature plans consist of clearly understood lines of action, each building on the previous and preparing the way for further advances. These actions involve all the participants in a dynamic learning process designed to place the new and older believers alike on the path of service. At the very heart of this process is the continuous influence of the Word of God coupled with creative consultation based on actual experience .... "<sup>11</sup>

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The posture of learning avoids searching for formulas that are to be followed strictly. Decisions are carried out, after consultation, with the understanding that the developments which follow will be observed and reflected upon. This community reflection is done in light of the wisdom enshrined in the Writings. In a learning environment fear of failure is eliminated, and the friends are helped to focus on achievements and the new capacity for progress that learning creates.<sup>12</sup>

The evolving institute process can ultimately lead to the establishment of a permanent institute-- "an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly engaged in the development of human resources capable of responding to the multiple demands of a rapid process of expansion and consolidation."<sup>13</sup> A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly described the role of this agency:

The Universal House of justice was delighted to learn from your letter dated 23 September 1994 ... of the establishment of the ... Baha'i institute for Development. It feels confident that the highly capable friends you have appointed to serve on the Board of Directors of this agency will be confirmed in their efforts to contribute to the emergence of an effective and ever-expanding process of development ...The role that the institute will play in coordinating and managing projects of social and economic development, such as your schools and the health project, is vital to the work of the Faith in your country. In addition, the institute will have to attend to the all-important task of developing the human resources of the Baha'i community...To this end, it will need to design programs and offer courses of various durations to enable the friends in carry out a wide range of activities.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Development of Human Resources**

The need for the systematic development of human resources has become apparent as the Faith has grown. In its early development, deepening courses, summer schools, and short-term training programs were sufficient to meet the needs of relatively small local communities. With the start of large-scale expansion in country after country, the emergence of the Faith from obscurity, and the challenge of initiating and sustaining entry by troops, the Baha'i world has faced increasingly more sophisticated challenges, as described in the Ridvan 1990 message.

An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our aforementioned commitments. Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely, expansion and

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consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, community is being forced to attain.<sup>15</sup>

The focus of the courses of a permanent institute will vary based on the growing complexity of the services to be rendered by the human resources prepared by the institute. For example, the initial objective might be the deepening of newly taught believers. The next step might require preparing effective teachers of the Cause and the training of individuals to perform specific services, such as deepening of others or teaching children's classes. Further development of the institute could include programs that address skills required for the progress of national community, such as proclamation, administrative service, or Baha'i scholarship. Social and economic development is another area in which an institute may become involved; its activities could range from simple courses for literacy or health to the management of schools, medical clinics, or other development projects.

So important is the development of human resources for the progress of the Faith at this time, that it was identified by the Universal House of Justice as one of three closely related aspects of the main theme of the Three Year Plan.<sup>16</sup> In a letter to the Counsellors designed to assist them in preparing for that Plan, the International Teaching Centre stated:

The urgency to increase the human resources of the Faith is not, however, limited to areas of large-scale expansion. The recent Advances of the Cause are shedding new light on the human resource needs of the worldwide Baha'i community for the coming years. Extensive collaboration with outside organizations, increasing involvement in a wide range of social and economic development projects, growing contact with the media, and consistent interaction with leaders of thought demand the development of new capabilities among the friends, who, although sincere and willing to serve, lack the necessary skills to respond to situations that presently overwhelm them. Greater attention, then, needs to be given to the systematic development of human resources for all avenues of service. In every national community it is imperative to discover fruitful approaches and to implement programs that will enable the friends to sustain accelerated growth and influence the various fields of human endeavor.<sup>17</sup>

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### **3. Relationship to the Institutions of the Faith**

#### **An Agency of the National Assembly**

From the foregoing description it is apparent that an institute is an agency of the National Assembly that has an integral role to play in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith and in the development of human resources for other areas of service. An institute complements and reinforces the work of national or regional committees-such as the National Teaching Committee or the Regional Teaching and Administrative Committee, While it would not be responsible for the complete plan of expansion and consolidation for a nation or a region, the institute as an agency represents one strategy of the National Assembly among the "unity in diversity of actions" required.

Baha'i world needs to foster a united clarity of vision for the expansion of the Cause and all its agencies, and a wide range of activities suited to the differing conditions of both the general population and the Individual Bahai's.<sup>18</sup>

...although your national institute should consider itself responsible for the development of human resources, and not for the execution of expansion and consolidation endeavors, it should not be isolated from the life of the Baha'i community, its programs must be relevant to the needs of the Faith in .... Consequently, the institute should collaborate closely with other agencies of your national administrative structure, for example, your National Teaching Committee and Child Education Committee. This will ensure that the institute's programs are helping to raise up individuals who can contribute effectively to national and regional plans of action.<sup>19</sup>

As the institutions and agencies of the Faith grow in maturity and the work increases in complexity, it is important to understand the complementary nature of their relationships rather than demanding that every agency serve every existing need. This is especially true when attempting to understand the function of a nascent agency such as an institute. Two analogies would help to clarify the situation.

In the body, the various cells and organs each have specific roles to play. Many organs combine together to form higher systems which themselves must interact and reinforce one another, An institute operates as one organ of the whole with its specific functions and contribution-that of supporting the progress of the Cause through the development of human resources.

An institute can also be seen to play a role similar to that of it school system in society. The school system educates and prepares human resources that are then able to contribute to society. On a basic level, the graduates are prepared to be "good citizens." They also possess specialized

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skills that can be utilized by government, business, or non-profit organizations. The school system does not run the operations of business or other organizations, but its relationship to them must be close so that its graduates have useful and effective skills. Similarly, an institute confirms individuals in their Faith and prepares believers with skills that can be tapped by Assemblies or committees or expressed through individual initiative.

In this context of the development of human resources, two important points should be noted. First, the institutions of the Faith cannot be compelled to utilize individuals who have completed certain institute courses—such as for committee appointments or as assistants to the Auxiliary Board—since such a requirement would evoke the notion of a trained priesthood. Second, the institute, when operating effectively, will train large numbers of individual who may or may not perform immediate service. For example, from a group of students who receive training as children's class teachers, perhaps only a few will arise to initiate classes. This cannot necessarily be considered a failure on the part of the Institute, whose course may very well have deepened the Faith of the other individuals. The training is itself a positive step which may need to be complemented by efforts of Assemblies or committees to develop plans that galvanize and channel individual initiative.

### **Vision of Growth**

The operation of a teaching institute takes place in the context of a broader vision for the spiritual advancement of a nation or region. A National Assembly, together with its National Teaching Committee, or a Regional Teaching and Administrative Committee considers the population to be reached and evaluates the existing circumstances before preparing a multifaceted, organic plan of action. An institute fulfills a key element in its overall vision of growth by preparing human resources for service.

Gradually, it is becoming clear to the friends that teaching, far from being a series of isolated and disconnected events, is a continuous and systematic process which organically combines a set of vital elements such as audacious proclamation; constant and unceasing expansion; deepening which places emphasis on the development of human resources for service to the Cause, and methodical, persevering efforts to strengthen local and national communities and develop their institutions.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to mention that the vision to which we refer here does not merely conceive goals and objectives but also delineates the path by which we can achieve our aims. What resources are presently available among the population under consideration? How can the existing human resources be trained and an ever-increasing number of new believers be recruited to go beyond acceptance to become dedicated workers for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith? What role might each one of the institutions play in the vital task of increasing the number of teachers and administrators from among the new believers themselves? The objectives of the Six Year Plan refer to long-term processes that are to be maintained and expanded in every region: the process of enrolling new believers through various methods, the spiritual education of children

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and youth in larger and larger numbers, the constant production of literature in languages understood by the people, the gradual deepening of the believers and their spiritual enrichment, the consolidation of the communities and their institutions, our involvement in the life of the society, and the pursuit of social and economic developmental of these are essential processes that must take shape in every region and merge into one great process of rapid expansion of the Faith followed by the steady consolidation of every gain.<sup>21</sup>

We are encouraged that you have been taking steps to launch the institute process. Growth is facilitated through the establishment of institutes of a permanent nature.... We see the institutes then as an important institutional element in systematic plans for large-scale expansion and consolidation.<sup>22</sup>

### **Increasing Institutional Capacity**

As has been mentioned, a permanent institute emerges as an institute process is establishment in a region. It continues to evolve as its institutional structure is consolidated and as its programs grow in range and complexity. Beginning with the deepening of new believers, activities expand to include the training of teachers of the Cause and children's class teachers, and continue through the training of individuals to undertake Baha'i social and economic development activities such as those related to literacy, health, or school programs.

The Initial organization of the institute may consist of a small group of individuals around which a pattern of action develops; ultimately, the National Assembly or responsible regional institution will need to appoint a committee to guide an increasingly more sophisticated program for human-resource development.

An approach to teaching institutes that is proving more successful is one that begins with a core group of experienced Baha'is and an evolving program for the spiritual education of the friends. Buildings and paid staff may or may not be included at the beginning. What is important is that a group of deepened Baha'is guided by a small committee and served by a coordinator, takes on the task of bringing together the more interested and promising believers, either to a central place or in smaller groups in the villages and towns, and of gradually developing for them a systematic program of deepening....

An important condition for the success of an institute seems to be close collaboration of Counsellors and Auxiliary board members with National Assemblies and their committees. In many countries of the world, it is necessary for the Counsellors to consult in depth with the National Assembly about the concept of an institute, help the Assembly identify a group of believers who can become a nucleus of the institute for a region or the entire country, and assist it in selecting from the group a small coordinating committee, including one individual who would act as the coordinator of the Institute. One or more Auxiliary Board members working under the Counsellor's direct guidance must then be given the special task of supporting this group, of promoting the development of appropriate materials (which at first may be simple adaptations of

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material from other institutes) and of participating In the systematic implementation of courses and programs.<sup>23</sup>

In every region, whether special facilities exist already or will have to be acquired in the future, the challenge facing the Baha'i communities now is to develop the programs and activities of institutes so that these become permanent elements in the plans of growth in their regions. Within these regional plans, the institute, perhaps initially with little Administrative machinery and simple program, but gradually developing the capacity to undertake more complex educational activities would be assigned the task of the continuous education and deepening of the friends and of helping to raise up from among them those who would become devoted workers for the Cause and its avowed supporters.

As we mentioned in our previous letter, we observe that some of the most successful institutes are those that have grown organically from the efforts of a core group of believers who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual education of their fellow Baha'is in their region. It is encouraging to see, then, that emphasis is now being placed by Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members on nurturing such core groups and on helping them to gain experience in designing and conducting educational activities in direct response to the needs of the population the institute is to serve.<sup>24</sup>

As the institute program becomes more complex, a National Assembly may find it beneficial to foster a more capable and autonomous administrative structure, such as a board of directors. The Assembly provides the vision, articulates needs, and establishes a general framework for action, while the board receives the independence necessary to execute its mandate and keeps the Assembly informed of its progress. This arrangement frees the Assembly and its committees from the onerous day-to-day duties of the institute. At this stage, the institute board may even assume responsibility for directing the affairs of it number of development projects.

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## 4. Curriculum

Any educational establishment offers courses, whose aim to prepare its students. So too, the essential function of an institute is the delivery of courses. The various courses presented by its institute make up its curriculum, which is intended to meet the threefold aim of conveying knowledge, fostering spiritual insight, and developing skills for service.

### The Design of the Curriculum

The courses of the institute are designed to meet carefully thought-out needs. In most parts of the world, the first level of courses provides fundamental deepening for individuals who often enrolled in the Faith through a limited exposure to the Teachings. After the first courses, the participant emerges confirmed in his belief in Baha'u'llah, and with a desire to serve His Cause.

However, care should be taken not to place excessive expectations on the initial courses. Each course is a building block upon which additional courses can be added until the expected capabilities for service are acquired by the participants. Patience and perseverance are the keys to developing courses that contribute to consistent action.

The purpose of this deepening is primarily to enable these believers to participate progressively in teaching the Faith to others, in deepening other believers, and also in serving in administrative capacities. While these programs may be simple at first, if the core group perseveres and acts consistently, gradually different types of courses are developed to enable the friends to take on the many tasks that the rapid expansion of the Faith requires from them.<sup>25</sup>

The first successful courses set the stage for future series of courses that assist the believer to follow various avenues of service.

... we are also witnessing the progress of an institute which, with the collaboration of some fifty devoted volunteers, themselves the fruits of the efforts of that institute, is carrying out deepening, educational, and even social and economic activities which are constantly growing in scope, here, the more basic courses are offered by the collaborators in the villages themselves, while the facilities of the institute are used for more specialized courses to deepen and train various types of workers for the Cause, such as teachers of children's classes, teachers of tutorial schools, animators of youth groups, animators of women's groups, assistants to Auxiliary Board members, and of course, the ever-growing number of people who must participate in, and even coordinate, large and small campaigns.<sup>26</sup>

A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice explains:

Some of these courses will be concerned with developing the capabilities of the friends to contribute to the expansion and

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consolidation of the Faith through acts such as teaching the Cause, conducting Baha'i children's classes, and fostering Baha'i family and community life, Others will need to concentrate on training believers in the area of social and economic development, for instance, as pre-primary and elementary school teachers and village health care workers.<sup>27</sup>

### **Advantages of a Diverse Curriculum**

Preparing students for a variety of opportunities for service is achieved through a diverse curriculum. In such a context, the value of those courses of fixed duration and those that focus on specific methods or topics are enhanced as they contribute to the broader program of a permanent institute.

However, in view of past experience we feel it is important to guard against allowing a certain kind of event, emphasizing one aspect of the teachings, to become a substitute for an institute program with various courses which, in their entirety, are concerned with the development of a wide range of human resources needed to carry forward the work of the Faith in a given country. ... it may well be possible, even at this early stage in the development of that community, to establish a permanent institute with a simple administrative structure and a few teachers who, on a regular basis, offer courses to the ... friends, especially the youth....In the context of such an institute program, an event of a few days duration, focusing on a specific topic, would be a complementary and useful element. In the absence of an overarching institute program, an event such as the kind in question can so narrow the focus of an entire Baha'i community on one type of activity-for example, on meditation-that it comes to be regarded as the only response which a process of large-scale expansion demands.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the aim ... is not to create cadres of individuals who would exclusively carry out certain tasks for the Faith. Training programs are to be open and directed to the enhancement of the diverse talents with which the friends are endowed. The purpose of such programs is not to reduce the individual to a mere instrument of a particular approach or method, but rather to develop in the friends the ability to explore possibilities and utilize every appropriate means at their disposal.<sup>29</sup>

### **Developing the Curriculum**

Although an institute serves the people of a particular region, the inauguration of an institute process is not conditioned upon the creation of unique materials. Development of educational materials is a complex process achieved through experience and reflection.

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The content of the courses would, naturally, have to be suited to the needs of the ...Baha'i community. These courses could be developed gradually, first by translating and adapting materials available from various sources and later, if necessary, by Writing new material.<sup>30</sup>

Once an institute process begins with materials from other institutes, experience will dictate the necessary modifications and the need for new materials, Eventually the permanent institute will develop its diversified curriculum addressing a number of paths of service. Institutes around the world are demonstrating an increasing commitment to the development of educational materials that can be shared with other communities.

... the preparation of courses will be an imposing change for your newly established national institute. This challenge will be met as initially the institute uses materials available from other national communities and gradually creates its own materials. It is expected that the capacity of your institute to offer a broad spectrum of training courses simultaneously will increase over the years. Those associated with the institute will need to consult, act on their decisions, learn from experience and move forward equipped with the new knowledge they have gained.<sup>31</sup>

It hopes that your Assembly will continue to find increasingly more effective ways to combine the expansion and consolidation of the Faith ... so that the processes of growth will accelerate beyond your already outstanding achievements. Of particular importance In this regard will be the development of human resources. According to Mr. . . 's report, at this stage, your community has some 500 believers who have attended at least one two- or three-day course to help enrich their spiritual life and enhance their ability to serve the Faith. As your community grows, you will find that Its needs in terms of human resources will increase and diversify commensurately. Your permanent institute will have to design courses of various durations to train believers to carry out a wide range of activities, such as teaching children's classes, fostering Baha'i family life, promoting the Advancement of women, engaging in teaching campaigns and facilitating meetings in villages which combine the study of the Holy Writings with consultations on the spiritual send material progress of the community. The development of such courses, whether based on materials already available or newly elaborated ones, is an indispensable component in an ongoing consolidation process. The content and duration of each course can best be determined in actual practice and should be the result of constant reflection on the effectiveness of your institute programs in developing the capabilities of the friends to serve the Cause.<sup>32</sup>

## **5. The Presentation of Courses**

### **Course Methods and Spiritual Empowerment**

Courses are the heart of an Institute. Beyond their content, the manner in which they are presented has a direct bearing on their influence. "For even when skills and abilities abound, it is attraction to the Blessed Perfection, firmness in the Covenant and Law of God, profound

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understanding of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, and good character that make possible new and fruitful approaches to the problems of humanity."<sup>33</sup> Among the factors that have a direct bearing on the presentation of courses are the use of the Word of God, the incorporation of participatory methods, and providing a disciplined yet spiritual atmosphere.

Institutes are most effective in inspiring the friends to serve when the explicit goal in designing and carrying out their programs is the spiritual empowerment of the believers. With spiritual empowerment as the main focus in each of its activities, the institute seeks to develop in the participants self-confidence, reliance on God, profound love for humanity, eagerness and burning desire to teach and serve mankind, steadfastness in the face of tests and trials, abundant joy and radiance of heart: in short, all those attitudes and attributes that are essential for a life of dedicated service to the Cause.

The institute's capacity to empower the believers spiritually is enhanced as its programs become well integrated and its a balance to achieved among various types of activities: those that impart knowledge about the Faith, those concerned with the skills needed to carry out specific acts of service, and those designed to help the participants gain insights into spiritual matters and develop their spiritual qualities. Emphasis on the study of Sacred Writings stands out as the single most important aspect of a successful program. An increasing number of institute participants throughout the world are also finding that memorization of passages from the Writings is of profound assistance to them in their efforts to walk the path of spiritual transformation. Another characteristic of successful institute programs is the use of participative methods. It is only when participants learn to become active agents of their own learning, rather than passive listeners, that the desired attitudes towards service are born and develop.

Though the use of the Creative Word and participative methods of learning, those who coordinate or facilitate institute activities will find that they are touching wellsprings of love, devotion and commitment in the participants. Where the Creative Word and participative methods are employed, the programs of the institute become attractive to the population, and the number of participants usually increases and does not dwindle. In such programs, it is unnecessary, then, to depend upon repeated emotional appeals as a motivational technique, because more profound sentiments and spiritual susceptibilities are constantly evoked and nurtured.

In addition to the content of the program and the methods used, the atmosphere of the institute is the most important factor in its success. Institute activities are highly effective when participants clearly perceive that the institute expects spiritual discipline of them and when, at the same time, the atmosphere of the institute is to permeated with love that the development of spiritual discipline becomes a personal goal rather than a requirement Imposed from outside. The use, then, of the Creative Word, the atmosphere of love and fellowship, a spiritual and disciplined environment free of subtle psychological pressures, well-integrated and balanced program content, and the use of participative methods: all the elements help make an institute an effective instrument for the development of true understanding in the believers. The programs of

such an institute operate simultaneously at the levels of mind, heart and spirit to inspire present and future generations of workers for the Cause.<sup>34</sup>

Another important factor in the presentation of courses is that the students and teacher should be seen as part of one process of learning for all. The relationship is not that of a learned one with a group of ignorant people-it is a reciprocal relationship involving the illumination of souls.

In accordance with the divine teachings in this glorious dispensation we should not belittle anyone and call him ignorant, saying: "You know not, but I know". Rather, we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain and demonstrate, we should speak as if we are investing the truth, saying: "Here these things are before us. Let us Investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found." The teacher should not consider himself as learned and others ignorant. Such a thought breedeth pride, and pride is not conducive to influence. The teacher should not see in himself any superiority, he should speak with the utmost kindness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerteth influence and educateth the souls.<sup>35</sup>

### **Where the Courses are Held**

The content, method, and duration of institute courses are influenced by the strategy adopted for their presentation. If all courses require a central location, such as a building, the population that can be served is limited, The institute may find students lacking In motivation to travel or stay extended periods at the Institute facilities it local courses are not offered to stimulate interest In further study. At the same time, courses held in homes or villages may not allow for a complete Immersion In a spiritual atmosphere conducive to profound transformation. A combination of approaches may be used depending on the goals of each course,

... in addition to conducting courses at a central location, your institute will need to train capable Individuals who can travel to various areas and offer short courses to the friends of several neighboring localities. This will lead to a greater number of believers entering your Institute program than would otherwise be the case. In turn, from those who attend these short courses, a certain percentage will be inspired to undertake more elaborate courses offered by your In5tituti.

Depending on the circumstances, such courses could either be conducted at a central location or be given throughout the country at various localities.<sup>35</sup>

### **Conclusion**

An institute training program as an agency of a National Assembly is engaged in the development of human resources and in the application of Baha'u'llah's Teachings to the problems of humanity. In this light, Institutes contribute to the emergence of a "growth-producing milieu-a Baha'i community whose members are domesticated to refining their understanding of the nature of teaching and to learning how to work together in ways that will

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both accelerate and sustain the process of expansion and consolidation.."<sup>36</sup> They assist a national community in assuming its own destiny and responsibility for the rapid progress of the Cause.

... entry by troops is not merely a stage of the progress of the Cause destined to occur in its own good time, dependent on the receptivity of the population as a whole-it is a phenomenon which the Baha'i community, by their own activities, call prepare for and help to bring about. It is also a process which ,once started, can be sustained. By a wise allocation of resources and the energetic pursuit of simultaneous plans of expansion, deepening and consolidation, the process of entry by troops should bring about a rapidly Increasing supply of active believers, soundly based on local communities, and steadily evolving local and national Baha'i institutions.<sup>37</sup>

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