

**18<sup>th</sup> Annual Bahá'í Black Men's Gathering**  
**Green Acre Bahá'í School**  
**Elliot, Maine**

July 17, 2004

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States  
536 Sheridan Road  
Wilmette, Illinois 60091

Dearly loved Deputies of God,

We address you with gladness and gratitude, humility and resolve, strengthened by our experience at the Black Men's Gathering, galvanized by the loving guidance you shared with us in your letter of July 13, 2004 and committed to redoubling our service to the Cause of God.

The news of this latest attack on our Faith, the destruction of the house of Mírzá Buzurg-i-Núrí, was met with shock, sadness, and outrage. This fresh injustice, coming so soon after the vile destruction of the gravesite of the heroic Letter of the Living, Quddús, pained us deeply and turned our thoughts to the safety of the Friends in Iran.

It also fired our hearts with a burning determination to increase our efforts to emblazon the name of Bahá'u'lláh throughout America and beyond. In your wisdom, you described this desecration as a “challenging assault” on our beloved Faith. We, the participants of the 18<sup>th</sup> Black Men's Gathering – individually – accept this brazen challenge. We hereby vow that even as the enemies of the Faith attempt to diminish its influence, we will, this year, become “shining star[s]” and “living proofs” of Bahá'u'lláh's world-wide, soul-regenerating influence.

We have already made a promising beginning. Of the 117 souls who attended the gathering this year, many arrived with personal tests and burdens shouldered since our last meeting. Despite those difficulties, we accomplished many of the individual goals we set last year to carry out the core activities of the Five Year Plan. Prompted by the counsels of the Universal House of Justice to systematize our teaching efforts, we have for the first time recorded our efforts numerically so that we may track our progress over the remaining years of the Plan.

We are pleased to report that a large number of us participated in at least one study circle utilizing Ruhi materials over the past year and more than a quarter of us have served as tutors. Evincing the outward looking orientation of these efforts, we reported a

significant number of seekers who took part in the study circles with which they were associated. We are also reaching out to youth and children in our communities; a quarter of the men gathered here led children's classes. Over half of us have organized devotional meetings, many of them in the soul-stirring style of the Black Men's Gathering. In all, our efforts over the last year led 13 new Bahá'ís to the Faith, four of them youths.

In addition to your letter, we were blessed by the presence of Counselor Eugene Andrews. He urged us to intensify our support of the core activities of the Five Year Plan, to execute them with an "outward looking orientation" in order to attract non-Bahá'ís, and to target African American seekers.

In response to these counsels from our senior institutions, the men at the gathering made new and bolder goals for the coming year.

As your letter graciously noted, 'Abdu'l-Bahá designated us "the Pupil of the Eye." And what seems manifestly evident to us, in light of the increasing attacks on the Faith, is that the kind of response required at this time is a spiritual and deeply personal commitment to rapidly expand this Cause.

Each of us have vowed to lead between one and 100 new souls – friends, relatives, neighbors and co-workers – to the Faith this year by doubling the number of core activities we participate in and lead. We will also continue to develop new "mini-Black Men's Gatherings," which have already been planned in Boston, northern New Jersey, Kansas City, Chicago, Oakland, Florida, Michigan, Oregon, Atlanta, Maine, Michigan, Virginia, South Carolina, Los Angeles and San Diego, and other cities. Unlike the annual Black Men's Gathering, these meetings will be open to as many non-Baha'is as possible in the hope that the mini-gatherings will be a portal into the Faith for African American men.

Our efforts will be guided in part by the insights gained from deepening at this year's gathering on the Universal House of Justice's 2004 Ridván message, and the compilations on the institutions of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Counselors. What we learned in those sessions will strengthen our vision, obedience, and understanding as we undertake the remaining goals of the Five Year Plan.

All of the progress we made over the course of the week was made easier by the beautiful atmosphere at Green Acre Bahá'í School, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá called "a great Center, the cause of the unity of the world of humanity." But beyond the beautiful setting, Green Acre's attentive and loving staff buoyed our spirits and demonstrated the essence of servitude.

This year participants came from all over the United States, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Honduras and Zimbabwe. We prayed as one soul, drumming, marching, dancing,

lifting our voices to our Lord in melodious unison, and calling upon Him to bless our efforts and steel our resolve. Our bonds of friendship were reinforced by mutual service, sacrifice, empathy, and countless belly laughs.

We concluded the gathering with our annual procession to the gravesites of Hand of Cause Louis Gregory and his beloved wife Louisa, in the company of some 200 guests where we praised their service and offered prayers for the progress of their souls.

Your tireless efforts as Chief Executor of the Tablets of the Divine Plan are an inspiring example for the Black Men's Gathering, as well as our fellow believers worldwide. We are praying that the spirit of the Blessed Beauty will continue to surround and guide all of your efforts.

With love and firm resolve,  
The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Black Men's Gathering

Enc: 1

c/o William Roberts  
wroberts@usbnc.org