

**19th Annual Black Men's Gathering  
Green Acre Bahá'í School  
Eliot, Maine USA**

July 16, 2005

The Universal House of Justice  
Baha'i World Center  
P.O. Box 155 31 001  
Haifa, Israel.

Dearly Beloved Supreme Body,

We, the 123 men of the 19th Annual Black Men's Gathering meeting at the Green Acre Baha'i School campus, opened our consultation this year by turning to the encouraging guidance offered to the Baha'is of the world in the 2005 Ridván Message. We regard the Message as nothing less than our "marching orders" for the remainder of the Five Year Plan. Throughout the week our thoughts continually returned to the urgency of the call sounded in the final paragraph of the Message; we are determined "not to lose the opportunity" that still beckons to us as the first plan of the fifth epoch in the Formative age of our faith draws to its close.

While the worldwide Baha'i community enters this crucial juncture in its development, the Black Men's Gathering has arrived at an exciting moment in its own evolution. Nineteen years ago twelve individuals came together to contemplate the role of black men in the unfolding drama set in motion by the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. In the time that has elapsed since that humble beginning, the Gathering has grown and has developed a fortunate record of service throughout the world. Yet, we celebrate our first nineteen years not simply by looking back, but by charting a new course for the future that is guided by instruction recently emerging from the Baha'i World Center.

Led in consultation by our cherished founder and facilitator Dr. William Roberts, the Brothers of the Gathering have decided that the annual meeting known as The Black Men's Gathering will now serve as an initial staging and coordinating ground for more than twenty local Black Men's Gatherings. These local Gatherings, many of which have been in development for several years, will now become the focus of our efforts. These local Gatherings will follow the successful model that, on a national/ international level, has developed over the years. However, these shorter and, perhaps, smaller Gatherings will be open to black men who are not yet Baha'is as well welcoming them to partake of the beauty and joy of the Cause of God. It is our hope that this plan for decentralization will serve to make the unique, healing and capacitating powers of the Gathering more accessible to the many black men who seek it, knowingly or not.

This exciting development in our focus, coupled with our earnest desire to help win the goals of the Five Year Plan, has determined the course of consultation during our week

here at Green Acre. We have been in the learning mode, reflecting upon the successes and shortcomings of a number of local Gatherings that were undertaken during the past year. Our strategy for each of the local Gatherings will take place in upcoming months. The measure of success in our efforts must and will be determined in the terms of the current plan. We discussed our past experience and future endeavors in relation to the core activities—and particularly the institute process. A study of the International Teaching Center's November 28, 2004 letter to the Board of Counsellors, furthered our understanding of the teaching, training and learning commitments that we know will hasten and sustain the process of entry by troops.

On our fifth day together, the Gathering was honored and inspired by the presence of dearly loved Continental Counsellor and brother Dr. Eugene Andrews. With special eloquence, he heightened our awareness of the need for systematic and deliberate action in this critical stage of The Five Year Plan and, by sharing the learning gathered from the worldwide teaching field. His comments emboldened us in our decision to more fully adopt an outward looking orientation that can undoubtedly help raise the human resources needed to carry out the work of our Cause. As he has done before, Counsellor Andrews particularly challenged us to bring the elixir of the Divine Physician to the black brothers and sisters who are everywhere waiting for its delivery.

This special mission was also encouraged by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States as they greeted the 19<sup>th</sup> Black Men's Gathering by letter. Our spirits were quickened as the National Assembly acknowledged the passing of two of our brothers during the past year pointing to the fact that they became staunch supporters of the Cause of God as a result of their participation in the Gathering, demonstrating their love of Baha'u'llah by fearlessly carrying His message to the black community and beyond. The brothers of this Gathering have only deep gratitude and respect for the National Spiritual Assembly that has continually supported and encouraged the Gathering for nearly two decades.

Of course, words can hardly do justice to the feeling of humility and honor that pervades our ranks as we consider the special acknowledgment and encouragement that The Universal House of Justice has bestowed upon the Gathering throughout the course of its first nineteen years. Our deep appreciation for the particular guidance and protection given to the Gathering by the Supreme Body can never be adequately expressed. We can only vow to return to the field "in serried lines," committed to carrying forward the work of this mighty Cause, and to winning the hearts of those designated "the pupil of the eye of humanity" by the Lord of the Age.

As always, we keep you in our prayers as we close the Gathering with a memorial procession and service at the resting place of our beloved Hand of the Cause Louis G. Gregory and his wife, Louisa.

We beseech your continued direction and humbly ask that we be remembered in your prayers at the Sacred Threshold.

With utmost love and reverence,

The Participants of the 19th Annual Black Men's Gathering