

20<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Bahá'í Black Men's Gathering  
Green Acre Bahá'í School  
Eliot, Maine

July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006

Dearly Beloved National Spiritual Assembly,

We, the 92 men assembled at Green Acre Bahá'í School for the 20<sup>th</sup> annual Black Men's Gathering; have joyfully received your letter of July 17, 2006. In its unmistakable kindness and in its continual return to the words of the Blessed Beauty, the message of encouragement and challenge brought illumination to hearts dilated in the Gathering's unique atmosphere of devotion and love.

As always, this year's Gathering has been graciously, expertly guided by our dear brother and your steadfast colleague and collaborator, Dr. William Roberts. Following his lead, we have trained our focus upon the recent guidance of the Supreme Body. The clear call of Universal House of Justice, urging us to review past accomplishments for the sake of future planning, has informed every moment of our deliberations which this year took on an evolved character due to exciting changes in our method of operations.

In past months, the model of the "national" Black Men's Gathering—which has proven so inspirational and capacitating—was replicated in 25 communities which held independent, local Gatherings. Thus, for the first time in its history, the Green Acre Black Men's Gathering became a venue primarily intended to systematically assess and plan for activities taking place in localities all across the United States and in several far-flung communities throughout the world.

As we measured the accomplishment of those recent efforts and planned for the future, we insistently called to mind the significance of those two complementary, reinforcing movements through which advancement of the process of entry by troops is taking place. Indeed, all our discussions have been girded by an understanding of the importance of the steady flow of individuals through the sequence of institute courses and the movement of clusters from one stage development to the next.

Although we have been, and continue to be, intimately concerned with all the core activities that sustain those processes, we have taken note of the emphasis now being placed upon the effort to develop and widely multiply junior youth groups. With the unique needs and capabilities of black boys in the forefront of our consciousness, and the specific encouragement in your message strengthening our resolve, we made commitments to sustain and enhance some of the very successful junior youth groups that have already emerged in association with the Gathering, and to emulate those models in

cities and neighborhoods that have yet to establish their own “programmes aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth.”

We are sure that our beloved brother and member of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas, Dr. Eugene Andrews will soon offer you some accounting of the precious moments he spent with the Gathering during two of our sessions, but we too are eager to give you a sense of the special spirit that animated our entire week together: This year’s Gathering has been characterized by an unprecedented level of dynamic, spontaneous and informal consultations. The Green Acre campus has been alive with a kinetic enthusiasm—it seems that at every free moment, in every corner, there is some group of brothers, sometimes small, at other times large; discussing the challenges they have faced in the field of service, recounting their successes, pledging to aid one another to win goals they have set for themselves. All seem acutely aware of the urgency of the hour, ready to sacrificially arise in promotion of the Divine Plan that has unfailingly emerged from our World Center since the time of the Beloved Master.

At its heart, the Gathering has always been a space of safe-haven, a place where the love of Bahá’u’lláh, animates song, prayer and common commitment in order to provide a shield of protection for men who have endured much in a sin-sick world. Secure within this fortification, we know that the Blessed Beauty loves us even as the “Pupil of the Eye,” and we have for two decades raised our voices toward the Kingdom of Abha in profound gratitude and supplication. At this year’s Gathering the sweet-sounding, soulful cry of “Here Am I! Here Am I!” has repeatedly ascended from our ranks toward the Concourse on High. With that refrain we have called down the confirmations of our Lord so that He will, again, heal our hearts and give us the strength necessary to carry out the work of His Cause. Now, we feel ourselves to be among those “lions that couch in thickets,” anticipating the moment of our return to the field, confident in the knowledge that the Blessed Perfection guides our every step.

In addition, we have contributed in excess of \$35,000, our humble effort toward achieving the goal of building the Bahá’í House of Worship in Chile.

We have, at this time of peril in the Holy Land, especially prayed for the protection of the Holy Places and for those serving at the World Centre; and we will, as always, remember you, our esteemed National Spiritual Assembly at the resting place of our beloved Hand of the Cause of God, Louise Gregory and his wife, Louisa.

With utmost love and reverence,

The Participants of the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Black Men’s Gathering