

Bahá'í Black Mens Gathering  
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To Our Universal House of Justice

With joyous and humbled hearts the 108 participants of the 2011 Black Mens Gathering greet you from the sweet scented hallowed ground of Green Acre Bahá'í School. From here, where the presence of the Beloved Master is still felt, we are overjoyed to not only share news of our experience but more importantly to express our gratitude for your unwavering guidance. From the days when we met at the Louis Gregory Bahá'í Institute in South Carolina until now, we are inspired by your messages sent to the Bahá'ís of the world generally and to us specifically. These messages took us across the African continent and through the implementation of the current series of Five Year Plans. They have guided our actions and protected us in times of tests.

Over the past 25 years the Black Mens Gathering has been vital in enabling its participants to respond to your calls, transforming their lives, to become more visible in the Bahá'í community, provided tools equipping them to be active agents of the Institute process and able servants of our Faith. Without your warm and loving embrace we dare say this would not have been possible. We are in awe of your precious and steadfast support.

Again, as in the past, Dr. William Roberts began this 25th Anniversary Black Mens Gathering with a session for young adult men of African descent. 25 younger brothers came together and met for the weekend consulting about the recent messages guiding the Bahá'í world to gain insights about how they could define a place for their service so important at this time. Extensive discussion on the idea of community building, reflecting on their relationships in the neighborhoods in which they live and about claiming ownership of these communities in order to play an active part in their development was rich. Study of the guidance enabled them to gain a greater understanding of the infallibility of the House of Justice and its importance to us in our lives. Twenty of these men remained as participants of the Larger BMG for the rest of the week where they contributed ably to the consultation.

Always we study your Ridván Letters, this year both the 2010 and 2011 messages. In addition, we deepened intensively on the 28 December message to the conference of Continental Counsellors. Also included in our study were the 1 January 2011 message and the 23 May 2011 message. Five members of the Auxiliary Board who were among us along with Dr. Roberts facilitated these study sessions with amazing acuity offering extraordinary insight and ensuring those special conversations so much a part of the BMG were accessible to all.

Building on our understanding of the previous Plan and in anticipation of the movement to come in the current Plan our sense of urgency was ignited. An increased understanding of the role we must play and the capacity each has to offer will better prepare us for the opportunities ahead. The exigencies outlined by the Supreme Body in the 28 December letter reveal the urgency for each of us to arise and serve mankind. Your reminder of the statement of Abdu'l-Baha, "ye must in this matter...lay down your very lives..." resonates within us. The possibility to contribute a share to the evolution of the Cause over the next five years is unlimited but also imperative for the transformation of ourselves, our society, and for all humanity.

We made time to have an in depth study and consultation on three letters written by your Institution to individual African American believers over a fifteen year period. Those letters dated 1 April 1996; 3 June 2007; and 10 April 2011; provided a stream of guidance for us that could not be shaken. The Plan of God is our answer no matter the question!

Among stories and reminiscences of our twenty five year history of service we paused to hear from Anthony Vance, Director of the Office of External Affairs for the United States National Assembly. His presentation provided valued insight into the painful circumstances of our fellow believers in Iran and the role we, as American Bahá'ís can play in bringing attention to this situation.

The vibration in our spirits arising from intense prayer and song, ardent study and consultation on your guidance, intense love for the Bahá'í Institutions, for the communities we serve and for one another, uplift our vision and renew our determination. Our pledge is to, with prayerful hearts, take flight as active servants of the Plan and to demonstrate in deeds our devotion to the framework you have outlined.

The magnitude of gratitude the Gathering holds for the Supreme Body can in no way be adequately conveyed in words- your encouragement has been ever so gentle and vigilant inviting us to greater heights in service to our Faith.

Our experience this week at the Black Mens Gathering has been life-altering. May all people feel the power of this love! May it transform minds, hearts and purpose. May it add beauty to this world! And may this same love cross the sea and earth, finding its way to Haifa, passing through the brilliance of the Holy Shrines, surround you and enter your hearts as you continue your service tirelessly.

Always, always, always your indebted servants,

Participants of the 25th Annual Black Mens Gathering  
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