

...Australia and New Zealand ...". He named both as "Hands of the Cause", in recognition of their special station in the advancement of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

Australians first accepted the Bahá'í message in 1922: Sydney optometrist Oswald Whitaker became first vice-chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand, and served on this body until his death in 1942; Melbourne artist Euphemia ("Effie") Baker travelled to various centres in Australia and New Zealand with international Bahá'í traveller and Esperantist, Martha Root in 1924, and made the first pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1925 together with some of the first New Zealand Bahá'ís. She remained in Haifa as hostess at the Western Pilgrim Hostel until 1936, assisting Shoghi Effendi, in addition, as photographer, and as first keeper of the International Archives. Early volumes of *The Bahá'í World* include numerous of her photographs of the Bahá'í monument gardens on Mt. Carmel. During 1930-31 Miss Baker travelled through Iraq to Persia, to make at Shoghi Effendi's request a photographic record of sites and relics associated with the origins of the Babí and Bahá'í religions, published shortly after with Shoghi Effendi's translation into English of Nabil's Narrative.

Within a few years the Dunns had attracted small communities of Bahá'ís in cities around Australia, as well as in New Zealand. There was little awareness at first of how the nine-member "Assemblies" functioned, and many of the first Bahá'ís had only a partial understanding of the fundamental beliefs and ideals of their newly-adopted Faith. The community included, on the other hand, such devoted and capable members as Gretta Lamprill, Perce and Maysie Almond, Bertha and Joe Dobbins, Harold and Florence Fitzner, Hilda Brooks, Rose Hawthorne, and Stanley and Mariette Bolton. These and other early Bahá'ís worked at holding public meetings and conducting public teaching campaigns, printing newsletters, presenting the Bahá'í message to public officials and prominent people, and consulting on the administrative affairs of a slowly expanding community. Shoghi Effendi observed many admirable qualities in the Australasian Bahá'ís. At one or another time he noted their perseverance, unity, determination, fidelity, diligence, thoroughness, courage, constancy, tenacity, zeal, loyalty, devotion, steadfastness, vitality, vigilance, and self-sacrifice. His observation of these qualities carried not only praise, but a responsibility to ensure their continuation. He referred not merely to evidences of "unity" amongst the friends, but to the need to "remain united". Repeatedly, when acknowledging the letters of individuals and institutions, he

urged them to "Persevere, be happy and confident".

The activities of the Australian Bahá'ís have not been without their struggles, and their limitations: whether these be lack of resources, capacity, or know-how. But Shoghi Effendi, all too aware of such limitations and obstacles, and having acknowledged them, pointed out to the Bahá'ís their accomplishments - which he so often referred to as "remarkable". He also placed their present labours in the context of tasks that lay ahead:

"The work in which your National Assembly is engaged," he wrote on one such occasion, "and which it is prosecuting with such fidelity, diligence and perseverance is near and dear to my heart. You are laying an unassailable foundation for the erection of mighty Bahá'í institutions which future generations are destined to extend and perfect. Your pioneer work is arduous and highly meritorious. I feel proud of your achievements, realising as I do the circumstances in which you labour. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is watching over you and is well-pleased with your service. Persevere and rest assured, Affectionately, Shoghi."

Viewed retrospectively, the achievements of seventy-five years of labour by the Australian Bahá'ís are indeed impressive, and can only be referred to in summary here. They result from the initiative of both individuals and groups; and they relate not only to the geographic and numeric expansion of the Bahá'í community, but to the development of the quality of Bahá'í life and to the gradually emerging location of the Bahá'í community in Australian society.

Geographically, the Bahá'í community spread only slowly in Australia, but these steadily emerging communities were themselves responsible for taking the Bahá'í message elsewhere, including countries of the Pacific Islands. There were some seventy Bahá'ís in 1934, and approximately 180 in 1947. By 1953, when the National Assembly commenced one of twelve "Ten Year" plans undertaken by the Bahá'ís world-wide, there were 60 Bahá'í centres in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania. Through a series of systematic plans undertaken since then, the Bahá'í community had grown by August 1994 to comprise 417 localities, including 193 Local Spiritual Assemblies. More than 80 ethnic and racial backgrounds are included in its membership of some 9,000 adults and 4,000 children.

Expansion of the community's administrative capacity and needs led in time to the acquisition of properties as local and

national secretariats. In 1944 the National Assembly acquired its first head-quarters (Hazirat'ul-Quds) in Sydney. In the 1970s the National administrative offices were relocated to Mona Vale, in the grounds of the Bahá'í House of Worship.

The acquisition of a site for a future House of Worship (Mashriqu'l-Adhkár) had been one of the community's major objectives in the 1950s. When plans to construct a House of Worship in Tehran were frustrated by a wave of persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran in 1955, Shoghi Effendi decided to build two others, in Kampala, and Sydney. After four years construction, the House of Worship was dedicated in September 1961. Shoghi Effendi's conviction that it would "exert a tremendous influence, both locally and internationally", was fully confirmed. For one thing, the nine-sided, domed building, attracted newspaper and television coverage. Construction, Plywood and Products, and other building and engineering journal, reported on technical aspects of the building, while such newspapers as the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror, Sydney Morning Herald, and Australian Post also carried reports. Most recently, the House of Worship featured in news coverage of bushfires which surrounded it in the summer of 1993-94.

The Australian Bahá'ís have been tireless in taking the Bahá'í message to leaders of thought, as well as to the Australian public, and publicity resulting from the construction of the House of Worship forms one part of a larger picture. When it was first realised that the Australian government was completely unaware of the Bahá'í community, Prime Minister Robert Menzies and all State Premiers were presented with copies of Bahá'í World VII (1936-38). Two pamphlets, "A brief statement of the Bahá'í attitude to war" and Emily Axford's essay "The non-political character of the Bahá'í Faith", were produced in large numbers to explain the Bahá'í position at the time of the Second World War. Proclamation activities continued in later years. In 1967 a nation-wide program of radio, television and newspaper coverage of Bahá'í activities, and presentation of books to government officials from the Prime Minister and Governor General down, was undertaken leading to the observance in 1968 of the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's public proclamation of his mission. In 1985 the National Teaching Committee sponsored the "Light up Australia" campaign, which included the use of television commercials in Queensland. In each successive year the Bahá'ís have received extensive publicity, particularly at the initiative of local communities.

The production of Bahá'í literature has always been a vital

component in sharing the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. When the magazine Herald of the South first appeared in 1925, Shoghi Effendi called it "the most effective instrument as yet devised for the spread of the Cause in that land". He encouraged its editors to raise their intellectual & artistic standards, as he had "great hopes" for it, and urged that it be made "as interesting & as stimulating ... as possible", through the inclusion of articles on "a wide range of material whether, social, religious or humanitarian." Bahá'í Quarterly, the National Assembly's news organ, subsequently named the Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, was founded in 1936. A Publishing Committee established in the 1930s produced additional books and pamphlets, and evolved in time into the Bahá'í Publishing Trust, established in 1975. Bahá'í Publications Australia published 20 titles in 1994, and has a further 20 titles in preparation. A major publication in 1995 is an edition of Shoghi Effendi's communications to all Bahá'í individuals and institutions in the Australasian region.

Yet another important activity undertaken by Bahá'í communities at all levels has been in the field of education. Bahá'í study classes are now held at local level country-wide. In a number of cities, weekend Bahá'í "schools" are teaching moral education to children and adults, and the National Bahá'í Education Committee has published two volumes of a curriculum for Bahá'í Education. In the public school system, more than one thousand children are choosing to attend Bahá'í scripture classes. At Yerrinbool, south of Sydney, facilities at the Yerrinbool Bahá'í School are being upgraded. A "summer school" was first held on the property of Stanley W. and Mariette Bolton in January 1938, and such schools have been held - whether in summer, winter, autumn or spring - each year since. In the 1970s the school established itself a "deepening, regenerating and teacher training centre". Special programs for children and youth were now offered, and the first Bahá'í Studies Conferences convened at Yerrinbool in the early 1980s. The Yerrinbool School and Institute Committee now also conducts such specialist courses as an "Education for Peace Certificate" for young people, and, commencing in 1995, a three year distance education "Certificate in Bahá'í Studies".

A further vital aspect of the growth of the Bahá'í community has been administrative consolidation. This has included - in addition to the multiplication and legal establishment of Bahá'í centres and Local Assemblies, the official recognition of Bahá'í holy days, and Bahá'í marriage certificates, the

maturity of the various committees appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly to take responsibility for diverse activities that made up the work of the Bahá'í community. By the 1980s, there were committees responsible for the Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, the Association for Bahá'í Studies, Australian International Pioneering Goals, for services and teaching at the Bahá'í House of Worship, for the publication and distribution of literature, for Children's Education, the "Herald of the South", and for the National Bahá'í Archives. There were also a National Aboriginal and Islander Committee, a National Bahá'í Information Office and State Information Offices, and Bahá'í Regional Offices (now Regional Teaching Committees) for all parts of Australia. There were, in addition, National committees responsible for Bahá'í Radio, for Teaching, Temple Property Development, and the Yerrinbool Bahá'í School. A National Community Development Committee was established to foster the strengthening of Local Spiritual Assemblies, and foster the equality of men and women, the quality of marriages, and the development of child education.

Another element in administrative consolidation involves development of the institutions of the "learned" - whose members have been appointed rather than elected, at national and regional levels. The institution of Auxiliary Board Members was established first, to advise on issues relevant to the development and promotion of the Bahá'í community. In 1954 Clara Dunn, in her capacity as a Hand of the Cause, appointed two Auxiliary Board Members, Thelma Perks, and H. Collis Featherstone (himself appointed a Hand of the Cause in 1957). In 1964 the number of Auxiliary Board Members in the Australasian Region increased from four to nine, including members appointed for New Zealand, Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Hawaii, and Saipan and the Mariana Islands. The number of Australasian Auxiliary Board members increased from 9 in 1968, to 63 in 1980, and 81 in 1986. In 1995 there are ... Auxiliary Board Members in Australia.

The first three members of the Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia were appointed in 1968: 1995, the region is served by nine Counsellors: Ben Ayala, Tinai Hancock, Sirius Naraqi, Gayle Morrison, Kamran Eshraghian, Violette Haake, Elizabeth Benson, Betra Majmeto, and Bruce Saunders. The Counsellors, as well as the Auxiliary Board Members, in their capacity as advisors to the elected institutions of National and Local Assemblies, contributed considerably to the maturation and effective functioning of Bahá'í communities not only in Australia, but throughout the Pacific Islands.

In the 1970s the Auxiliary Board Members appointed assistants for the first time, primarily for the purpose of encouraging local communities in their activities. In 1977 a system of "Unit Conventions" was introduced, for election of delegates to National Convention. The Continental Board of Counsellors sponsored "Covenant Institutes" designed to strengthen and deepen allegiance and service to the Bahá'í cause. The National Assembly cooperated with the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board Members in running workshops in each state on the functioning of the Local Spiritual Assembly. In the 1980s Local Assemblies increasingly took the initiative in planning large-scale activities. From 1983 the Kentish community sponsored a series of annual "alternatives" weekends, highlighting alternative technologies and lifestyles. Newcastle community fostered a sister city relationship with Ube, in Japan. Tasmanian communities sponsored "health and healing" seminars. Other "grass roots" initiatives included the formation in 1984 of the Bahá'í Business and Professional Association. Seminars promoting social and economic development were held in South Australia.

Bahá'í Youth played an important role in teaching activities during the plan. In April 1969 they held a first National Youth Conference at Yerrinbool. Larger conferences were later held in all the capital cities. Increasingly, youth have communicated their ideas through visual and performing arts. Musical and literary skills within the Bahá'í community have always been appreciated and encouraged, and the first Bahá'ís frequently included recitals in their programs. The House of Worship choir, established in the 1960s, has earned a reputation for excellence. In 1994 it participated in a choral eisteddfod. Other forms of music have also been used to take the message of Bahá'u'lláh to ever wider audiences. Groups including "1844", the Western Australian Bahá'í Singers, and Galimaufery, performed widely in the 1970s. In the 1980s, annual tours by the "Wildfire" theatre group took the Bahá'í message through performance of drama and music to audiences in Australia, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

All Bahá'í activities, whether at local or national level, and whether by members young or old, are focussed on the achievement of peace. In the early 1980s concern at the threat of global nuclear conflict brought a new level of pessimism to Australian society, and the response of many was a turn to materialism and individual concerns. The challenge facing the Bahá'ís, wrote the Universal House of Justice at the time, was to "consolidate and deepen its own Bahá'í community and, in the face of the forces of materialism engulfing modern

society, seek out the pure hearts who are ready to embrace the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh..." To implement this, a National Community Development Committee prepared a program for the development of children, youth, adults, families, and communities.

In 1984 the National Assembly submitted a statement on peace to a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. The statement by the Universal House of Justice to the peoples of the world, *The Promise of World Peace*, was presented to the Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen in October 1985, and the following year Sir Ninian attended a service in the House of Worship observing the International Year of Peace. To mark that year the Bahá'ís held a "Peace Exposition" in the Temple grounds, which attracted 10,000 visitors. Peace Festivals also sponsored by the Bahá'ís of Atherton, Caboolture, and Fremantle. The National Assembly received a "Peace Messenger" award from the United Nations for activities throughout the Australian Bahá'í community during the International Year of Peace. The Universal House of Justice summarised the achievements of the Australian Bahá'í Community in a cable to a National Teaching Conference held in Tweed Heads in September 1986:

...We have been greatly heartened by the response of the Australian Bahá'í community to the pressing calls upon it. Not only are your goals being won, they are being surpassed. We have witnessed an abundance of other victories following upon each other in quick succession: the establishment of a network of Local Spiritual Assemblies over the entire continent; the marked success in bringing the Faith to the Aborigines and their warm response as evidenced by the recent happenings in Western Australia; the revival of the "Herald of the South" in collaboration with the New Zealand Bahá'í community; the success of the Australian community in bringing to the attention of the Australian Parliament and media, the plight of the oppressed Bahá'ís in Iran which has been such an important factor in the emergence of the Faith from obscurity; the exemplary display of brotherhood and hospitality of Australian Bahá'ís in welcoming large numbers of the Iranian fellow-believers to their community - these are but a few of the accomplishments which have brought joy to our hearts and a feeling of great assurance to our souls.

The persecution of Bahá'ís that followed the Islamic

Revolution in Iran in 1979 prompted extensive contact with government officials and the mass media in Australia, and resulted in the arrival of many Persian Bahá'ís in Australia as refugees. Although immigration policy made entry into Australia difficult into the 1960s, some Persian Bahá'í families had arrived from Indonesia and elsewhere at the end of the 1950s. In the 1960s the National Assembly consulted with the Department of Immigration on the requirements for bringing additional Bahá'ís into Australia, and the eventual easing of policy restrictions resulted in successful migration.

The Australian government actively defended the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran. In February 1981 the Senate of the Australian parliament adopted a resolution deploring their persecution, and in August a similar resolution was adopted by the House of Representatives. In March 1982 the government established a special humanitarian assistance program, under which Persian Bahá'í refugees were eligible to migrate to Australia. The Australian Bahá'í community worked hard to raise awareness of the plight of the Bahá'ís in Iran. It made representations to the heads of Commonwealth Governments when they met in Australia in September/October 1981, and in 1982 extensive media coverage was gained on government television programs (ABC) and "60 Minutes" (Iran's Hidden Holocaust). In the next decade more Persian refugees per capita were received in Australia than in any other Bahá'í community; by 1988 Persians comprised 38% of the Australian Bahá'í community. Although the years of persecution, and the sacrifice of the martyrs is not forgotten, the story of the arrival of Persian Bahá'ís in Australia is at the same time one of re-birth into a new culture, and a new land. By spreading through the Australian continent, into the remotest country towns and even to the islands of the Pacific, Persian Bahá'ís have added an unimagined dimension to the emerging "World Order" of Bahá'u'lláh.

Another significant activity within the Australian Bahá'í community has been its reception of Aboriginal members. Aboriginals first became Bahá'ís in South Australia and the Northern Territory in the 1950s. Bahá'ís involved in Aboriginal teaching at this time included Greta Lake in Sydney, Kath Marcus and Ann Pearce in South Australia, and Frank Saunders in the Northern Territory. In a letter of 24 July 1955, Shoghi Effendi reminded the National Spiritual Assembly of "the importance of increasing the representation of the minority races, such as the Aborigines and the Maoris, within the Bahá'í Community. Special effort should be made to contact these people and to teach them; and the Bahá'ís in Australia and New Zealand should consider that every one of them that can be won to the Faith is a

precious acquisition." An Aborigine Committee was established in 1956. Fred Murray (1884-1963) of the Minen tribe, and Beryl and Marjory Tripp, became Bahá'ís in 1961. Fred Murray attended the 1963 London World Congress. By 1968 the Bahá'í community included members of the Andilyaugwa (Groote Island), Bunanditj, Jirkia Minning, Junjan, Minen, and Narrogin tribes, and by 1983 there were four Local Assemblies in Aboriginal areas. In 1985 an important meeting took place in Onslow, Western Australia, between members of the National Assembly, the Carnarvon Bahá'í community, and Onslow Aboriginal elders, which resulted in acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings by tribal elder Herbert Parker. Jack Malardy, leader of the Karradjjarrie people at La Grange, also became a Bahá'í, together with more than one hundred of his people. Similar events have occurred in North Queensland.

In October 1993, during the United Nations Year of Indigenous People, Bahá'ís from Australia and the Pacific participated in an International Cultural Festival, Bahá'í Heart of Australia Calling, held in Alice Springs in collaboration with the Arrrente Council, and in 1994 the National Spiritual Assembly presented a statement on the reconciliation process to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Year by year, through quiet activities and with sincere purpose, Bahá'í individuals and Assemblies have cemented friendships with Aboriginal communities, and sought to express in action the principles of unity in diversity, and the oneness of humankind, that inform their Faith.

At different stages in the evolution of the Australian Bahá'í community major conferences have been held to celebrate victories won, and to consult on the requirements of the time. In addition to such national conferences, four major international Bahá'í gatherings have been held in Australia. In March 1958, mid-way through the Ten Year Crusade, one of four "inter-continental" conferences was held in Sydney, attended by Bahá'ís from across Asia and the Pacific. A second conference in Sydney, in 1967, marked the mid-point of the nine year plan, and coincided with the centenary of the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh. A third major conference in Canberra, in 1982, attracted 2,400 Bahá'ís from 45 countries. It was one of five international conferences held at this time, announced the Universal House of Justice, "to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf (Bahiyiyih Khanum, daughter of Bahá'u'lláh), to discuss anew the present condition of the Faith in a turbulent world society, to examine the great opportunities for its future growth and development, and to focus attention on the unfulfilled goals of the

plan." In November 1992, 2,000 Bahá'ís attended the Sydney conference, a satellite conference of the second World Congress, held in New York. "A full century has gone by", commenced the message to the World Congress by the Universal House of Justice, "since the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was established and set in motion... We are particularly pleased that we have been afforded a special opportunity to pause for a moment, together with our fellow-believers, to gather our thoughts, to see how we have fared since 1892, and to consider where we are now headed."

The diversity of these and other International conferences have provided emphasis to the international character of the Bahá'í community, and to the contribution that Bahá'í pioneers have made to the development of Bahá'í communities in other countries. Australian Bahá'ís first pioneered to the islands of the Pacific in the 1950s. In the 1970s, a new generation of pioneers departed for Fiji, Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Laos, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam, and other countries in Asia, the Pacific, and as far afield as Africa. Now, in 1995, the countries in which Australian Bahá'ís are pioneering include China, Macau, Taiwan, Poland, Hungary, Japan, Hong Kong, and Vanuatu.

This article has sought to highlight some major themes in the progress of the Australian Bahá'í community during its first seventy-five years. It can only hint at the work of so many individual Bahá'ís, working in families and in local communities, to create communities in accordance with the laws and principles of their Faith: fostering good character; developing spiritual qualities through individual effort, and prayer; recognizing and developing of the unique talents and abilities of each person; and establishing interactive relations between the spiritual and practical requirements of life; and playing an increasingly active role in public life. It can refer only in brief to the way in which observance of the Bahá'í calendar is promoting harmony, through bringing diverse peoples and families together each nineteen days for the "Feast", at which the spiritual, administrative and social life of the community is nourished; and it can only note how Local Assemblies are growing in strength and maturity, as they observe the Bahá'í calendar and holy days, organise study classes for children, youth and adults, provide counsel to those in distress, and turn their attention to the welfare of the needy in their midst. In 1992 the Universal House of Justice called on this community to devote "prayer, dedicated consultation, and intelligent analysis" to its current circumstances and opportunities. The results of these processes are yet to be

assessed. Whatever its continuing challenges and urgent needs, the Australian Bahá'í community can nonetheless be held in high regard as one community in which people of diverse cultural, racial, national, and social backgrounds are meeting in common purpose, aware of Bahá'u'lláh's call to humanity to unite in its diversity, and wanting to assist in the establishment of His emerging World Order.

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