

Pioneering

August 2019

A compilation of selected guidance prepared at the request
of the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand

The most meritorious service which anyone could render is to bring the light of divine guidance and the quickening power of the spirit to an entirely new area.¹

Tablets of the Divine Plan - the vision, concepts and strategies

In the Tablets of the Divine Plan 'Abdu'l-Bahá not only provided the broad vision necessary to carry out the responsibilities entrusted by Bahá'u'lláh to His loved ones, but He also outlined spiritual concepts and practical strategies necessary for success. In His exhortations to teach and to travel to teach; to arise personally or deputize others; to move to all parts of the world and open countries and territories, each meticulously named; to learn the relevant languages and translate and disseminate the Sacred Texts; to train the teachers of the Faith and especially youth; to teach the masses and, particularly, indigenous peoples; to be firm in the Covenant and protect the Faith; and to sow seeds and cultivate them in a process of organic growth, we find hallmarks of the entire series of Plans—each a specific stage of the Divine Plan shaped by the Head of the Faith—that will continue to unfold throughout the Formative Age.²

The true function of every pioneer

To remain at one's post, to undergo sacrifice and hardship, loneliness and, if necessary, persecution, in order to hold aloft the torch of Bahá'u'lláh, is the true function of every pioneer.³

The primary object: Teach the native population

In connection with the teaching work throughout the Pacific area, he fully believes that in many cases the white society is difficult to interest in anything but its own superficial activities. The Bahá'ís must identify themselves on the one hand, as much as they reasonably can, with the life of the white people, so as not to become ostracized, criticized and eventually ousted from their hard-won pioneer posts. On the other hand, they must bear in mind that the primary object of their living there is to teach the native population the Faith. This they must do with tact and discretion, in order not to forfeit their foot-hold in these islands which are so often so difficult of access.⁴

Leave only after consultation

No pioneer should leave his post unless there is some very urgent reason and then only after consultation with the appropriate committee or National Assembly.⁵

¹ Letter dated 11 March 1956, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Baha'i community of Tacoma

² Universal House of Justice, letter dated 26 March 2016 to the Baha'is of the World acting under the mandate of 'Abdu'l-Baha

³ Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 17 June 1954 to a National Spiritual Assembly

⁴ Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Letters to Australia and New Zealand

⁵ Shoghi Effendi, Messages to Canada

Sacrifice our interests and mingle with divers kindreds

Let us scatter to the uttermost corners of the earth; sacrifice our personal interests, comforts, tastes and pleasures; mingle with the divers kindreds and peoples of the world; familiarize ourselves with their manners, traditions, thoughts and customs; arouse, stimulate and maintain universal interest in the Movement, and at the same time endeavor by all the means in our power, by concentrated and persistent attention, to enlist the unreserved allegiance and the active support of the more hopeful and receptive among our hearers.⁶

Adapt the presentation

Nor should any of the pioneers, at this early stage in the upbuilding of Bahá'í national communities, overlook the fundamental prerequisite for any successful teaching enterprise, which is to adapt the presentation of the fundamental principles of their Faith to the cultural and religious backgrounds, the ideologies, and the temperament of the divers races and nations whom they are called upon to enlighten and attract.⁷

The heart of the individual and the strategic judgment of the institutions

The desire to pioneer arises naturally from deep within the heart of the individual believer as a response to the Divine summons. Whosoever forsakes his or her home for the purpose of teaching the Cause joins the ranks of those noble souls whose achievements down the decades have illumined the annals of Bahá'í pioneering. We cherish the hope that many will be moved to render this meritorious service during the next Plan, whether on the home front or in the international field—an act that, in itself, attracts untold blessings.

The institutions, in turn, will have to exercise sound judgment to ensure that such friends are strategically placed. Priority should be given to settling short-term and long-term pioneers in those clusters that are the focus of systematic attention, whether as a means of reinforcing endeavors to lay the groundwork for accelerated growth or stabilizing cycles of activity under way. It is not unreasonable to assume that a concerted effort to build on strength will result in the eventual outflow of pioneers from such clusters to areas destined to become the theatre of future conquests.⁸

If we are reluctant to concentrate efforts on spreading the Cause

In the “Bayan” the Bab says that every religion of the past was fit to become universal. The only reason why they failed to attain that mark was the incompetence of their followers. He then proceeds to give a definite promise that this would not be the fate of the revelation of “Him Whom God would make manifest”, that it will become universal and include all the people of the world. This shows that we will ultimately succeed. But could we not, through our shortcomings, failures to sacrifice and reluctance to concentrate our efforts in spreading the Cause, retard the realization of that ideal? And what would that mean? It shall mean that we will be held responsible before God, that the race will remain longer in its state of waywardness, that wars would not be so soon averted, that human suffering will last longer.⁹

⁶ Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration

⁷ Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith

⁸ Shoghi Effendi, Advent of Divine Justice

⁹ Letter dated 20 February 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual

Knock hard

It is not enough for the friends to make the excuse that their best teachers and their exemplary believers have arisen and answered the call to pioneer. A “best teacher” and an “exemplary believer” is ultimately neither more nor less than an ordinary Baha’i who has consecrated himself to the work of the Faith, deepened his knowledge and understanding of its Teachings, placed his confidence in Baha’u’llah, and arisen to serve Him to the best of his ability. This door is one which we are assured will open before the face of every follower of the Faith who knocks hard enough, so to speak. When the will and the desire are strong enough, the means will be found and the way opened either to do more work locally, to go to a new goal town within the United States, or to enter the foreign pioneer field...¹⁰

All ways of pioneering are valid

There are several ways of pioneering, and all are entirely valid and are of great help to the teaching work. There is, first of all, the pioneer who goes to a particular country, devotes the remainder of his life to the service of the Faith in that land and finally lays his bones to rest in its soil. Secondly, there is the pioneer who goes to a post, serves valiantly there until the native Bahá’í community is strongly established, and then moves on to new fields of service. Thirdly, there are those, for example youth between the completion of their schooling and the starting of their chosen profession, who go pioneering for a specific limited period.¹¹

Systematic sustained dispersion

NOTHING SHORT PROMPT WIDE SYSTEMATIC SUSTAINED DISPERSION CAN PROPERLY SAFEGUARD FRUITS PAST LABORS SACRIFICES CAN COMPENSATE DISABILITIES AFFLICTING INCAPACITATED COMMUNITIES OTHER CONTINENTS CAN ADEQUATELY FULFILL PURPOSE FOR WHICH ENTIRE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY PAINSTAKINGLY FASHIONED CAN CONCLUSIVELY CONFOUND MACHINATIONS CONTEMPTIBLE ENEMIES CAN SUBSTANTIALLY REINFORCE IMPETUS ALREADY IMPARTED PIONEER ACTIVITIES ORIENTAL BELIEVERS CAN SUFFICIENTLY EMPOWER AMERICAN BAHÁ’ÍS DISCHARGE PARAMOUNT OBLIGATION CONTRIBUTE FULFILLMENT AMERICA’S SPIRITUAL DESTINY OR CAN PRECIPITATE FLOW SPIRITUAL ENERGIES ENABLING SOUL COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUALS COMPRISING IT DRAW NIGH IMBIBE SPIRIT BAHÁ’U’LLÁH PROVE WORTHY UNTOLD BLESSINGS ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ HAND DOWN UNIMPAIRED FUTURE GENERATIONS TORCH TRANSMITTED THEM HEROIC SPIRITUAL PREDECESSORS PERSIA.¹²

When to be content

Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.¹³

¹⁰ From a letter dated 21 September 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

¹¹ Universal House of Justice, 25 May 1975

¹² Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*

¹³ Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*

Behavior towards your neighbor

Your behavior towards your neighbor should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye are the first among men to be recreated by His Spirit, the first to adore and bow the knee before Him, the first to circle round His throne of glory.¹⁴

Learning languages

The Lord hath granted leave to whosoever desireth it that he be instructed in the divers tongues of the world that he may deliver the Message of the Cause of God throughout the East and throughout the West, that he make mention of Him amidst the kindreds and peoples of the world in such wise that hearts may revive and the moldering bone be quickened.¹⁵

What would 'Abdu'l-Baha do?

If my health were good at present, I would not wait one day longer. I would go not only to America but to all parts of the world to cry and call out. Had I been free during the forty years of my imprisonment in 'Akka, I would have travelled to the East, West, North and South of the world. I would not have kept still for one minute and I would have illumined the horizons with the light of the Sun of Reality. And then you would have seen what great results had been obtained.¹⁶

One soul

"It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation..."¹⁷

Every Spot

Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation¹⁸

Essential ingredients in New Zealand

Pioneers, traveling teachers and a fresh outpouring of funds are essential ingredients to the onward march of the Cause throughout Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the South Pacific. Let those who can offer their valued services to the teaching work arise without delay; let those who cannot travel or pioneer deputize those who can go in their stead.¹⁹

All believers

The duties of teaching and pioneering are enjoined upon all believers.²⁰

¹⁴ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings

¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, published in *Star of the West*, Vol IX, 8 September 1918

¹⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan

¹⁸ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings

¹⁹ Universal House of Justice, January 1977 message to the friends assembled at the International Teaching Conference in Auckland

²⁰ Universal House of Justice, letter dated 7 February 1965 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

Additional resources:

[Keynote of the Crusade](#), message of 8 June 1953 to the inter continental conference in New Delhi

Homefront Pioneering Toolkit Atlantic Region

Prepared in July 2017 under the auspices of the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Atlantic States

Reflections from a Homefront Pioneer to a Goal Cluster

It all started with study of the March 26, 2016 message from the Universal House of Justice, addressed “To the chosen recipients of Abdu'l-Baha's Tablets of the Divine Plan”. In the last paragraph of this letter, the House says: *“Take pride in the sacrifices and victories of so many devoted souls who arose in response to 'Abdu'l-Baha's call. With the same spirit of renunciation shown by your predecessors, cast away the idle fancies and distractions of a world that has lost its way, that you may consecrate yourselves in the next five years to the priceless opportunities and inescapable obligations of the latest stage of a spiritual enterprise on which the fate of humanity ultimately depends.”*

This was indeed my call. The House was asking us to take pride in the sacrifices of our predecessors and--with the same spirit that they evinced--cast away the distractions of this world. I felt like they were asking me to sacrifice just like the early believers did in the time of Abdul-Baha. I meditated on the message, trying to imagine the sacrifices of the early American Baha'is -- and what was going on in their lives and in their minds when they were first reading the Tablets of the Divine Plan. The more I meditated and prayed, the more I was convinced that I am not sacrificing enough and need to do something about it. Soon, I realized that with few changes in my life, I could pioneer to one of the clusters in my region that needed pioneers; so, I made the decision to go! Those few changes turned out to be more challenging than I expected, and sometimes, I even thought that I made the wrong decision. But every time that I continued on with my planning, I would inevitably receive confirmations. And now, looking back, I know that my doubts were tests. (Baha'u'llah wanted to see how serious I was about my decision!) Things eventually worked out; my work situation resolved itself, and at the end of January 2017, I was able to move to my pioneering post part-time.

When I arrived at my post, even though it was a first milestone cluster, the only core activity taking place was on hold. So, I invited my neighbors to a gathering in my home and looked for other neighborhoods where I could engage youth in conversations about serving their communities. I found a medium size neighborhood with a community center right in the middle of it, and then I introduced myself to the staff and was able to speak with a woman who ran the center. I explained the junior youth program to her and she gave me permission to talk to the youth in the neighborhood. This was March 2017. We started working in this neighborhood and, as of this month (July), we have five youth in the training: three from the neighborhood itself, and two of their friends from other neighborhoods. We will soon finish the training and start two junior youth groups.

These youth are very excited and are already planning where they will start their groups! A part-time move to a milestone one cluster has brought this cluster to where it is in six months.

I don't have words to express the joy and happiness that I feel for what has happened so far in this cluster. Sometimes when I am making the three-hour drive to the cluster, I can't hold back my tears, thinking of how blessed I am to be chosen by Baha'u'llah as the instrument to bring this cluster one step closer to the second milestone (an intensive program of growth).



I am sure that we all can do what I did. Doing so just requires firm determination, prayer, and willingness to accept some adjustments in our lives.

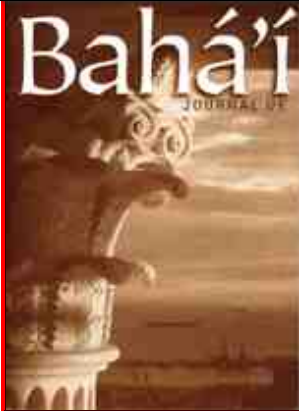
Homefront Pioneering Toolkit Atlantic Region

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Reflections from a Homefront Pioneer to a Goal Cluster

Please consider pioneering at this crucial time in the Five Year Plan. The opportunities are priceless!!! The obligation is inescapable!!

We need YOU!!! Humanity needs YOU!!



Travel Teacher & Homefront Pioneer Advisory Service

Important aspects of the Five Year Plan

Travel teaching and homefront pioneering will remain important aspects of the Five Year Plan launched at Ridvan. Regular circulation of the friends on teaching circuits and special teaching trips stimulates activity and can strengthen both the traveller and the communities visited. Travel teaching is the forgotten Third Condition for success in our efforts (*see article in the Feb Bahá'í Journal*)

Two lists In preparation for the Plan, the Travel Teaching Service is setting up two files to bring together the needs of communities and the talents and capacities of the friends. We are working closely, and share information with the Four Bahá'í Councils in this project and information shared with one institution is shared with the other.

The first is a **list of communities** throughout the UK who need and would welcome travel teachers - either on a regular basis to help with teaching projects and deepening programmes, or for special events and projects.

The second is a **list of Bahá'ís** who are prepared to help meet those needs and to travel, either on a regular basis to other communities to help with their teaching and consolidation programmes, or to make special visits to or tours of other communities to provide additional support. We already have a short list of such friends, we would like to see it greatly expanded.

Remember though, we have only a limited number of friends who have offered at this stage to Travel Teach. We may not, therefore, be able to help with every request for help in the short term. **Please let us know.**

1. What regular firesides/deepenings/other activities do you have that a visiting travel teacher might help with?
2. Do you have special needs? (e.g. someone who can talk with Christians/Muslims/academics/schools/the socially disadvantaged, someone who is musical)
3. What help can you give visiting teachers, if needed?
4. Are there any special circumstances affecting the teaching work in your area about which visiting Bahá'ís should be aware?
5. Does the community have procedures in place to handle visitors at short notice if an opportunity should arise?
6. Are there any members of your community who are willing to travel teach? If so, are you able to offer them any support if they need it?

1. What are you willing (and unwilling) to do. (e.g. Can you speak at a fireside or conduct a deepening - and what subjects would you prefer to speak on, or would you prefer to visit isolated believers for a friendly chat? Would you be willing to help with public activities: public meetings, exhibitions, meeting local dignitaries ...?)

How else can you help?

2. How far you are able to travel, how frequently you can make trips, and what help you may need - assistance with travelling expenses and accommodation for instance.
3. Tell us too, without false modesty, something about yourself - your

Assemblies and Groups (and isolated believers) are asked to let us know the following information (**Secretaries, please bring this to your next assembly/group meeting**)

What can Communities do?

What can Individuals do?

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Highlights

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- Beyond Words
- UK Community History
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Bahá'í and other experience, what special talents and interests you have. This will help the communities you visit to plan, publicise and make best use of your time. Do you have special qualifications or achievements that might be of interest to the local media?

Let us know by: Email to Travel Teaching Service tts@bahai.org.uk or
fill in the questionnaire on the TTS web site www.bahai.org.uk/tts/.

Pioneer

A **pioneer** is a volunteer Bahá'í who leaves his or her home to journey to another place (often another country) for the purpose of teaching the Bahá'í Faith. The act of so moving is termed **pioneering**.

During the Ten Year Crusade which ran from 1953 to 1963, hundreds of pioneers settled in countries and territories throughout the world, which eventually led to the establishment of 44 new National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies and the increase in the Bahá'í population.

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See also

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References

Teaching work

The teaching work done by pioneers was done in many different ways including, but not limited to

- Conversation with people who are receptive to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.
- Firesides: meetings held in one's home to which those interested in the Bahá'í Faith are invited.
- Public talks: Lectures given about the Bahá'í Faith.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, has written:

"An effort, moreover, can and should be made, not only by representative Bahá'í bodies, but also by prospective teachers, as well as by other individual believers, deprived of the privilege of visiting those shores or of settling on that continent, to seize every opportunity that presents itself to make the acquaintance, and awaken the genuine interest, of such people who are either citizens of these countries, or are in any way connected with them, whatever be their interests or profession. Through the kindness shown them, or any literature which may be given them, or any connection which they may establish with them, the American believers can thereby sow such seeds in their hearts as might, in future circumstances, germinate and yield the most unexpected results.^[1]

Teaching versus proselytization

For Bahá'ís, pioneering refers to something similar to missionary work. However, Bahá'ís do not consider pioneering to be proselytism, a word which often has negative associations with coercive Christian missionaries.

"Care, however, should, at all times, be exercised, lest in their eagerness to further the international interests of the Faith they frustrate their purpose, and turn away, through any act that might be misconstrued as an attempt to proselytize and bring undue pressure upon them, those whom they wish to win over to their Cause."^[1]

"It is true that Bahá'u'lláh lays on every Bahá'í the duty to teach His Faith. At the same time, however, we are forbidden to proselytize, so it is important for all the believers to understand the difference between teaching and proselytizing. It is a significant difference and, in some countries where teaching a religion is permitted, but proselytizing is forbidden, the distinction is made in the law of the land. Proselytizing implies bringing undue pressure to bear upon someone to change his Faith. It is also usually understood to imply the making of threats or the offering of material benefits as an inducement to conversion. In some countries mission schools or hospitals, for all the good they do, are regarded with suspicion and even aversion by the local authorities because they are considered to be material inducements to conversion and hence instruments of proselytization."^[2]

The following is a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual:

"He sees no objection to the word Missionary appearing on your passport as long as it is clearly understood what kind of a 'missionary' a Bahá'í pioneer is. In the best and highest sense of the term it certainly could be applied to our teachers. Unfortunately this word has often been associated with a narrow-minded, bigoted type of proselytizing quite alien to the Bahá'í method of spreading our teachings."^[3]

Pioneering in the time of Bahá'u'lláh

Even during the time of Bahá'u'lláh, certain individuals were moving to other countries, sometimes at the express suggestion of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. For example, one or more believers went to live in Bombay (Mumbai), and were able to have Bahá'í Scripture printed there, for subsequent circulation.

Pioneering in the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

During the years of 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry, the Faith expanded into a number of new countries, often through deliberate pioneering moves. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked Ibrahim Khayrullah to settle in America to teach the Faith. In 1916, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a collection of letters known as the Tablets of the Divine Plan, urging pioneers to arise and go to the various countries and territories of the world. These Tablets were not immediately distributed among the believers because of the communication difficulties during the First World War. By the end of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there were Bahá'ís in 21 different countries.

Pioneering in the time of Shoghi Effendi

During the first years of the Guardianship, Shoghi Effendi concentrated on establishing the pattern of the Administrative Order, but when a country had reached a certain level of organisation, he began giving the National Spiritual Assemblies plans for growth and expansion. Typically, these would involve internal pioneering, but then external pioneering became a feature, for example during the campaign to establish the Faith throughout Central and South America (American Seven Year Plan of 1937-1944). These various national plans were replaced, in 1953, by the Ten Year Crusade, which aimed to plant the Faith in every country, territory and significant island group in the world. Shoghi Effendi died, of course, before the completion of this plan, but lived to see its many early successes. The title Knight of Bahá'u'lláh was given by Shoghi Effendi to Bahá'ís who arose to open new territories to the Faith during this crusade.

Pioneering since the time of the Guardian

The Universal House of Justice, in each plan, allocated internal goals to many National Spiritual Assemblies, usually the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies. Such goals would normally be won by pioneers making the goal town their home, and then increasing the numbers by teaching. In other words, there would be a combination of pioneering and declarations of local people. In addition, external pioneering goals were given to many National Spiritual Assemblies. Increasingly, information was given out as to what types of employment might be called for in the goal country, or to what regions of the goal country needed to receive the pioneers. Further, the pioneering goals were sometimes related to the skills of any potential pioneers, e.g. administrative experience, financial expertise, a dedication to deepening, knowledge of a specific language, etc.

Although the vast majority of the world's countries and territories were opened during the Ten Year Crusade, it was with the collapse of most of the Communist régimes from 1989 onwards that the last few independent countries, including Mongolia and Albania, were opened. In addition, pioneers were encouraged to settle in former Communist countries in eastern Europe and in the various republics of the former Soviet Union.

By the 2010s, the emphasis in most countries was on internal pioneers. Believers who had gained experience in tutoring study circles, in teaching children's classes or animating Junior Youth Groups were voluntarily moving from the more advanced clusters to the less advanced ones. The first milestone in the growth process in a cluster is worded in such a way that a single pioneer or pioneer family can institute just one activity, with help from one or more local person, and the first milestone has arguably been reached.

See also

- Ten Year Crusade
- Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Notes

1. Effendi, Shoghi (1938). *The Advent of Divine Justice* (<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/ADJ/adj-3.html#pg66>). Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. pp. pp. 65. ISBN 0877431957.
2. Letter from the Universal House of Justice, 1982 Jan 03, Teaching vs. Proselytizing.
3. Letter written by Shoghi Effendi on February 7, 1945] published in Effendi, Shoghi (1983). Hornby, Helen (Ed.), ed. *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File* (http://bahai-library.com/?file=hornby_lights_guidance). Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India. ISBN 8185091463.

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