

Message from the Executive Committee of the Association for Bahá'í Studies

It is with joy and gratitude that the Executive Committee introduces this special issue of *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, marking over fifty years since the Association's founding in 1975 under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. The occasion of the Association's Fiftieth Annual Conference in Ottawa this August offers an opportunity to reflect on this shared history, and to renew the sense of purpose that carries the work forward.

This special issue brings that reflection together in several parts. It opens with a beautiful letter of felicitation from the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, which draws upon an equally inspiring letter it received from the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, together reflecting the warmth with which both Assemblies have accompanied the Association's journey. An executive summary then offers a concise account of its development, followed by a fuller retrospective tracing that same history in greater depth, from the founding conference through the present, building in part on the Ten Year Retrospective published in this *Journal* in 2023. Alongside

these institutional accounts, a series of personal reflections from friends who have been closely engaged with the Association's activities over the years and decades brings a dimension no institutional narrative can fully convey. Next, two companion essays, "Approach to Learning" and "Learning in Action: Insights from Collaborative Initiatives," examine the conceptual framework and evolving experience that have come increasingly to guide the Association's progress since 2013. Finally, two appendices, listing notable plenary speakers at each annual conference and Executive Committee members by year, complete the issue as a resource for those wishing to follow its history in greater detail.

None of this growth would have been possible without the guidance of the Universal House of Justice at every stage along the way, the sustained encouragement and advice of serving and former members of the Universal House of Justice, as well as many Continental Counsellors, and the constant support of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Canada and the United States. It would equally have been impossible without the vision and sacrifice of those who gave the Association its initial impetus, the generosity of its donors, and the devotion of countless collaborators, volunteers, and participants across five decades. We wish especially to thank the members of the Committee for Collaborative Initiatives, whose efforts have helped give shape to much of what is described in these pages; the editorial staff, whose care and attention

brought this special issue to completion; a number of reviewers, each of whom has served the Association for many years, for their assistance in ensuring the accuracy of the retrospective or elements of it; and several other close collaborators, including those who have served on other subcommittees—such as the Conference Committee, the JBS Editorial Committee, and the ABS Publishing Committee—and as facilitators of the Association's expanding ecosystem of initiatives, all of whose contributions have been essential to its continued growth.

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Other collaborators are listed in the essay "Learning in Action."