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Three Teaching Methods Used during North America's First Seven-Year Plan

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Abstract

Not much research has been conducted on teaching methods used by American Bahá'ís to tell people about the Bahá'í Faith. This article explains three different teaching methods used to accomplish the homefront local spiritual assembly goals during the first Seven-Year Plan (1937–1944) in North America. The first two methods, firesides and teaching campaigns, had been evolving during the early 1930s. The third, pioneer settlements, was not used systematically until the Seven-Year Plan. Because many of the spiritual assembly goals were in the South, the difficulties caused by the race question influenced but did not radically change the teaching methods.

Résumé

Les méthodes d'enseignement utilisées par les bahá'ís americains pour faire connaître la Foi bahá'íe a leurs concitoyens ont fait l'oblet de peu d'études jusqu'à présent. Cet article s'attache donc à examiner trois des méthodes utilisées pour accomplir les objectifs établis dans le premier Plan de sept ans (1937–1944) relativement à la formation d'assemblées spirituelles locales en Amérique du Nord. Alors que les deux premières méthodes—les coins de feu et les campagnes d'enseignement—avaient déjà connu une certaine évolution durant les années 30, la troisième méthode—l'établissement de pionniers—n'avait jamais encore été utilisée de façon systématique avant ce Plan de sept ans. Étant donné que bon nombre des localités visées par cet objectif se trouvaient dans les États du Sud, les difficultés soulevées par les questions raciales ont influé sur ces méthodes d'enseignenment, sans toutefois les modifier de jaçon radicale.

Resumen

Es poca la investigación que se ha hecho sobre los métodos de enseñanza utilizados por los bahá'ís estadounidenses para informar a la gente acerca de la Fe Bahá'í. Esta disertación sondea tres métodos de enseñanza diferentes que se usaron para lograr las metas vecinales de Asambleas Espirituales locales durante el primer Plan de Siete Años (1937–1944) en America del Norte. Los dos métodos iniciales, charlas hogareñas y campañas de enseñanza, comenzaron su desarrollo durante los principlos de la década de 1930. El tercero, la instalación de pioneros, no fue usado en forma sistemática hasta el Plan de Siete Años. Por el hecho de que muchas de las metas referentes a Asambleas Espirituales estaban ubicadas en el Sur, las dificultades causadas por el asunto racial produjeron efecto, per no afectaron a raíz los métodos de enseñanza.

When Shoghi Effendi launched North America's first Seven-Year Plan in 1937, most of the Bahá'í population in the United States and Canada was still concentrated around large communities such as Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco, where the Bahá'í Faith had first been established. There were thirty-four states and Canadian provinces that had no local spiritual assemblies, including ten with no Bahá'ís at all. Shoghi Effendi called upon the Bahá'ís to fill these open areas with local spiritual assemblies before 1944, the end of the first Bahá'í century. Thereby, the homefront teaching goal was to establish an assembly in each of the thirty-four virgin states and provinces (*Bahá'í World* 9: 200–202). This article will briefly explore three of the teaching and consolidation methods used: firesides, teaching campaigns, and homefront settlement or pioneering.

Bahá'u'lláh had called for his followers to work specifically to take his message to all of humanity:

> Say: Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds. . . . He hath, moreover, ordained that His Cause he taught through the power of men's utterance, and not through resort to violence. (*Gleanings* 278)
>
> Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call. Without it, he can never hope to influence his hearers. (*Gleanings* 335)

In *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, a series of letters addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid down the specifics of how the geographical spread of the Bahá'í Faith was to be accomplished. These tablets, written in 1916–1917 and received in North America by 1919, gave North American Bahá'ís the leading role in opening the world to the Bahá'í Faith. The American Bahá'ís immediately responded to this call but did not accomplish much due to their lack of organization and small numbers. During the 1920s and 1930s Shoghi Effendi focused the efforts of the North American Bahá'ís on building an administrative order and on beginning work on the Bahá'í House of Worship at Wilmette, Illinois. This period also saw an increase in the size and diversity of the Bahá'í communities. Thus, by 1937, the North American Bahá'ís were ready to begin a systematic campaign to create local Bahá'í communities in those virgin territories both in North America and in other continents (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 376–78, 396–99; Ioas, 25 June 1935).

None of these methods being discussed were being used for the first time, as variations of the methods had been used by Bahá'ís from the earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith in America, but often the methodology had not been clearly defined or executed on a collective basis under the direction of Bahá'i administrative bodies. The first Seven-Year Plan provided the focus for the teaching methods used, but the methods sprang from each individual's responsibility to teach the Bahá'í Faith, as instructed by Bahá'u'lláh. Teaching in this regard meant locating receptive souls and assisting them to investigate the Bahá'í Faith. The Universal House of Justice, in its 1990 Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the world, stated that teaching has two primary objectives: expansion and consolidation. Expansion is the increase in the number of Bahá'ís, and consolidation is the integration and activation of new believers in well-functioning local Bahá'í communities.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada,[1] under the constant guidance of Shoghi Effendi, had been gradually developing its administrative abilities and structures. Most of the National Spiritual Assembly's work was conducted through a number of appointed national committees. These included the National Teaching Committee (NTC), which had gone through a series of administrative experiments, trying out both centralization and decentralization. The NTC played a key role in coordinating the teaching work nationally and therefore was involved in all the teaching methods being discussed. During the 1930s, the National Teaching Committee gained experience and efficiency in trying to stimulate teaching activities throughout the United States and Canada. Leroy Ioas (1896–1965), who joined the NTC in the early 1930s, was to play a crucial role in this development, as he had given much thought to the different types of teaching and the need for proper consolidation and development of new local Bahá'í communities (*Bahá'í News* 85 [July, 1935]: 7–10).

By 1929, the National Teaching Committee was concentrating on using the local spiritual assemblies, through their extension teaching projects, to expand the number of localities and to open new territories. The NTC was also trying to encourage, with limited success, the local assemblies, as well as the three summer schools, to train more Bahá'í teachers, which were in short supply (NTC 1935 Annual Report).

The Fireside

The first teaching method to be discussed is the fireside.[2] Leroy Ioas felt that it was the most successful method in developing contacts with new inquirers and as such should be the backbone of the teaching program. In a 1935 letter to Allen McDaniel, Mr. Ioas said that the National Teaching Committee had, for the past three years, been trying to change the introversion of the American Bahá'í community. Part of the introversion came from the belief that only special Bahá'ís could teach, such as the two former paid national teachers Albert Vail (1880–1966) and Louis Gregory (1874–1951). Therefore, the National Teaching Committee was trying to use the personal fireside method to encourage every Bahá'í to become an active teacher. Ioas also believed that firesides would increase the pool of contacts and thereby help build the audiences for other teaching activities, such as public lectures. Finally individual teaching would stimulate local community life and cause assemblies to expand their horizons (letter dated May 26, 1935).

It is difficult to document specific firesides over a period of time and have case studies of them because there was no national reporting system developed, as there were with teaching campaigns and homefront settlements. People might comment on a specific fireside event that they attended, but it is difficult to follow an on-going fireside over a period of time. As firesides were often affairs by individual Bahá'ís, they were often not reported to Bahá'í institutions. Perhaps research into local spiritual assembly records might provide more documentation.

The National Teaching Committee outlined the advantages of the fireside in a 1936 teaching bulletin:

> The fireside method of teaching is the simplest and most important kind of teaching because it is within the ability of every Bahá'í. Statistics show that more people are attracted to the Faith by this means than by all

> the public meetings held by all the Assemblies in any year. It is simple because each one works with his own friends and acquaintances in the friendly atmosphere of his own home, sharing with them as much of a Precious Gift as he possesses. And it is important because it provides opportunity for teaching services for those who cannot do public platform work. . . . Everyone responds to hospitality and the hospitality of the Bahá'í home which is permeated with the Holy Spirit has an almost mysterious effect upon the guest. In such an atmosphere the conversation sooner or later turns to spiritual matters, and thus the opportunity for teaching is afforded. . . . These fireside meetings should never be large. The small gathering is more effective because it is always easier to establish a point of contact with one or two individuals than with a group of widely varied interests and backgrounds, and this point of contact must be reached before any teaching can begin. . . . There should be a number of these intimate, conversational gatherings during which the individual may ask those questions which are uppermost in his mind. When they have been answered to the satisfaction of the inquirer, then the foundation should be laid for an orderly study of the Faith in a study class which will instruct him "in what manner the Religion of God hath been founded and what its object is." (NTC 1936 "Teaching the Bahá'í Faith" 1–2)

Thus, the fireside method was a very flexible one and was widely used in the other two methods under discussion. Homefront pioneers used firesides extensively in their teaching work. Teachers like Mabel Ives who carried on teaching campaigns would also meet individually with interested people and talk with them one-to-one about the Bahá'í Faith.

From the fireside, most local communities would channel serious inquirers to study classes, where a systematic study of the Bahá'í Faith was made. By 1932, most communities had study classes, which, according to the NTC's 1932 annual report, were

> proving to be a versatile and effective medium of teaching…. Probably very few study groups are of the same type. They are large and small, public and private, for inquirers, new believers and confirmed Bahá'ís of long standing. They are usually based on one or more of the study outlines distributed by the National Bahá'í Study Committee or upon some Bahá'í book. They have resulted in a deeper knowledge of the teachings, the development of active workers and teachers, and many new believers. (3)

It appears that the general belief by Bahá'ís in the 1930s, which was supported by the National Spiritual Assembly, was that the initial education on the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith should be done before a person was enrolled and joined a Bahá'í community and not afterwards (National Spiritual Assembly Statement).

Systematic Teaching Campaigns

The second teaching method to be discussed, systematic teaching campaigns, had been gradually developing since at least the late 1920s. But the campaigns were carried out by only a small number of Bahá'í teachers. The three most proficient at conducting these campaigns appear to be Orcella Rexford (d. 1946), Ruth Moffett (1880–1978), abd Mabel Ives (1878–1943). There were others, like Grace Ober (d. 1938), Keith Ransom-Kehler (d. 1933), Gita Orlova (b. 1887), Artemus Lamb (b. 1905), and Dorothy Baker (1898–1954), who also conducted some intensive lecture series, and these may have been comparable to those done by Rexford, Moffett, and Ives. The exact chronology is still unclear, but it is possible that Orcella Rexford originated the teaching campaign concept; Ruth Moffett adopted it and passed it on to Mabel Ives. The teaching campaign was difficult to carry out as it required a good Bahá'í speaker, with excellent stamina, who could devote full time to the work and who was good at building an audience through invitations, posters, personal contacts with sympathetic organizations, and newspaper and radio publicity. To be successful, the teaching campaign also required intensive follow-up work. When this follow-up was lacking, it was difficult to weld the enrolments from the teaching campaign into a functioning, unified, stable local Bahá'í community.

The first of these Bahá'í teachers, Orcella Rexford, was a professional lecturer who made her living speaking on diets and the use of colors with furnishings. As early as 1927, she started using her professional lectures to proclaim the Bahá'í Faith. During her professional lectures she would allude to the Bahá'í message and invite the audience to a free lecture on spiritual subjects. This lecture would be a straight Bahá'í talk, and at the end she would invite the audience to join a Bahá'í study class. Rexford was usually not interested in giving the study classes herself, so the NTC arranged for other Bahá'í teachers to follow her unless there was a local Bahá'í community that could handle the classes. Two of her earlier teaching campaigns in Phoenix and Denver will be used as examples, as she was less active during the Seven-Year Plan due to ill health. When Rexford went to Phoenix in 1929, there were only two Bahá'ís residing there. Through her lecture series she was able to generate a study class, which averaged from twenty-two to thirty-five in attendance. The class was taught by Edwinna Powell (d. 1949) in seven sessions, covering the central figures and the major principles of the Bahá'í Faith, and Bahá'í administration, including the role of the believer and the local spiritual assembly. During the latter part of the class, the participants were given homework and subjects on which to make presentations at the next meeting. During the sixth session, the participants were given an opportunity to state if they wished to join the Phoenix Bahá'í community, and twenty-one adults and three youth said they did (Phoenix report, Latimer Papers). Rexford reached large audiences with her professional lectures and could generate substantial Bahá'í classes. When Rexford went to Denver the following year, the Bahá'í lecture was constantly mentioned in her five weeks of professional lectures, with 10,000 invitations being sent out and 5,000 invitations requested. The result was that initially 400 people were attending an evening Bahá'í study class and seventy-five a morning class. The teaching work also generated good Bahá'í book sales, as each Bahá'í lecture had a table with Bahá'í books to purchase. In Denver, Rexford sold 400 copies of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (*Bahá'í News* 48 [Feb., 1931]).

But from the beginning these new Bahá'í groups were vulnerable if not promptly consolidated. Phoenix had to receive additional teachers like Elizabeth Greenleaf (1863–1941) for several years to protect the group from several members who were interested in reincarnation and spiritualism and who tried to break up the group.

The various teaching campaigns undertaken by Mabel Ives, Orcella Rexford, and Ruth Moffett show that the most difficult part of establishing a new Bahá'í community was not in expansion but in consolidation. A good example of this was Moncton, New Brunswick, in Canada. The community was established through one of Mabel Ives's teaching campaigns in 1937–1938. Mabel Ives gave her regular lecture series, with an average attendance of thirty. Out of the lectures came a study class of twenty-five and eleven enrollments in a three-month period. As Mrs. Ives described the work in a letter to her husband, "For six consecutive evenings, the lectures were held at the Brunswick Hotel, with the audiences averaging about 30 tho [*sic*] running up to 37 and 39 on two evenings. We always had a question period and fine questions were asked. Of course some Penticostal [*sic*] people tried to nail me to the wall on the matter of the second coming of Christ, but Bahá'u'lláh guided me and I came out with a whole skin, and the rest not disturbed, apparently" (30 October 1937). It was work that greatly impressed the National Teaching Committee. However, as Harlan Ober pointed out, its successes were made possible because Mabel Ives was able to spend full time on it and did not have to hold a full-time job. Instead, shp spent fourteen hours a day on the teaching and proclamation activities (Ober, 13 January 1938). A local, spiritual assembly was formed in Moncton on April 21, 1938.

But the troubles of the National Teaching Committee were just beginning, as Moncton proved to be a very difficult community to stabilize and maintain. It was not a large community, and just a few people moving out could drop the size of the community below the nine members needed to maintain its spiritual assembly. So the Moncton Spiritual Assembly was lost in 1939 and had to be reformed in 1942 and again in 1944. Mabel Ives explained the difficulty in consolidating Moncton:

> The city is a clasic [*sic*] example of what happens when there is not adequate follow-up work. When I left, there were four souls who I felt could be counted on to shoulder the responsibilities of the Cause. But the others while they had accepted the Faith and had a pretty good idea of what it was all about, they did not have that type of stability that could go forward on its own steam, so to speak. There are always this kind in any new group. Then there were two: who were caught up in a personality bywater. Every teaching has that difficulty. There are always some who cannot see beyond the teacher. That is most unfortunate and always a big problem. They are always emotional types and not very stable, yet full of fire and enthusiasm. The correct and devoted follow-up work can tide these people over their difficult time of adjustment which always follows and build them into true Bahá'ís. But without this help so much work and money is wasted and so much heart-ache to all concerned insues [*sic*]. (NTC, n.d.)

Many of the local spiritual assembly goals were in the Southern states, and there the consolidation problems were compounded by the racial prejudices so strong in that region. In October, 1939, Mabel Ives went to Memphis, Tennessee, to help establish a local spiritual assembly there. She conducted her usual teaching campaign with a series of nine lectures, followed by a study class. The attendance at the lectures averaged twenty-six. The study class started with over twenty people and averaged fifteen in each session. Five people, all white, became Bahá'ís as a result of the study classes. Another Bahá'í, Alvin Blum (1912–1968), had moved into the community; so there were now six white Bahá'ís. When Mrs. Ives arrived, Memphis already had a group of African-American Bahá'ís, centered around Professor George Henderson (d. 1944) and his business school. Thus, the Memphis Bahá'í community had a racial diversity of membership. The strong racial hatred in Memphis complicated both the teaching activities and the development of interracial communities (Ives, 5 January 1941; McKay, 21 March 1941).

Mabel Ives's first reaction, which was echoed by other white Bahá'í teachers in the South, like Emogene Hoagg (1869–1945) and Kathryn Vernon (c. 1885–1983), was that the only way the racial situation could be improved was to have sufficient numbers of white Southerners become Bahá'ís either to change Southern society or, through their numbers, protect the black Bahá'ís. Only then should the Bahá'í Faith be taught to blacks in any great numbers (Ives, 5 January 1941). Mabel Ives expressed these views to Shoghi Effendi and received the following answer in 1942:

> Regarding the whole manner of teaching the Faith in the South: The Guardian feels that, although the greatest consideration should be shown the feelings of white people in the South whom we are teaching, under no circumstances should we discriminate in their favor, consider them more valuable to the Cause than their Negro fellow-southerners, or single them out to be taught the Message first…. The Negro and white races should he offered, simultaneously, on a basis of equality, the Message of Bahá'u'lláh….
>
> This does not mean that we should go against the laws of the state, pursue a radical course which will stir up trouble, and cause misunderstanding. On the contrary, the Guardian feels that, where no other course is open, the two races should be taught separately until they are fully conscious of the implications of being a Bahá'í, and then be confirmed and admitted to voting membership. Once, however, this has happened, they cannot shun each other's company, and feel the Cause to be like other Faiths in the South, with separate white and black compartments. (Quoted in *Bahá'í News* 161 [March, 1943]: 2)

Mabel Ives assured Shoghi Effendi that she would follow his advice and would send copies of this letter to the other active Bahá'í teachers in the South.

Mrs. Ives found that the African-American Bahá'ís had never been adequately educated concerning the Bahá'í Faith. She had difficulty finding them and getting them to come to Bahá'í events. Only Professor Henderson, Dr. and Mrs. Watkins, and two young girls still seemed to be firm Bahá'ís. Part of the problem was that Mabel Ives worked best teaching and working with those who were better educated and more intellectual. The black Bahá'ís in Memphis were not as well educated as the blacks Ives had worked with in the North or in Nashville, and she found them less reliable in keeping commitments (Ives, 26 July 1940). Ives also faced racial prejudices among the new white Bahá'ís in Memphis. By January, 1941, she was back in Memphis with Doris McKay to consolidate the community so that it could form a local spiritual assembly on April 21st. The problem was that once an assembly was formed, the white and the black believers would need to start meeting at Nineteen Day Feasts, and some of the new white Bahá'ís would not accept such integrated meetings. It is unclear whether Ives or McKay was doing most of the consolidation work, but they tried to meet the problem through prayers, consultation, and discussions on Bahá'í administration. Administration of the Bahá'í community there was difficult because the new white believers were from the Unitarian Church and distrusted authority. McKay and Ives also had both to update the membership list of black Bahá'ís, as some had moved, and to train the remaining black Bahá'ís in administration. This project included meeting with Dr. Watkins to bring him up to date with developments in the Bahá'í Faith, such as the Bahá'í attitude toward politics and government, and indeed verifying that lie was still a Bahá'í. He accepted everything, as his faith in Bahá'u'lláh had remained firm during seventeen years of isolation. In the end, three of the new white Bahá'ís left the religion, but the rest overcame their prejudices and fears of social ostracism and attended, with the blacks, the first joint Nineteen-Day Feast, which was held at the Henderson Business College on March 20, 1941 (Ives, 21 March 1941).

As has been seen, both Rexford and Ives were most comfortable with attracting people to the Bahá'í Faith and then having other teachers do the lengthier follow-up work. As Mabel Ives commented on the campaign method when discussing her work in Little Rock, Arkansas:

> The campaign method is the only one that brings any kind of tangible results in terms of believers, *if* study classes are carried on faithfully to the end. And I much prefer going to a brand new city where the Cause has never been heard of, and starting from scratch, and putting on a campaign. All my best results have been achieved that way. The individual and group work conies *after* the lecture series…. I leave there [Little Rock] Mar. 15th, someone must be ready to take over immediately. A break of even one week is distrous [*sic*]. Just as in the consecutive lecture series a momentum is gradually built up, that is lost by the lapse of more than one or two days at the most, so in the study class, nothing must interfere with its continuity. I am speaking from many years of trial and error, until the most successful way emerged. Ruth Moffett sold me on the nightly lectures. And I had grave doubts until I tried them out. And now after a number of years of using it and perfecting details, it has proved itself to me as the best method I know

> anything about. I wouldn't think of starting in L.R. unless I was sure it could be carried to completion. (Ives, 10 January 1941)

Ruth Moffett's teaching campaign method was somewhat different, as she preferred to work intensively with a group of inquirers for two or three weeks and then leave to give the group a breathing spell and a chance to work out any problems among themselves outside the presence of their teacher, Then Moffett would return for more intensive work, lifting the group to a higher level (Moffett, 7 June 1936). Most of the teaching campaigns were team efforts, and the primary teachers recognized this importance. Mabel Ives saw this in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1942 after a teaching campaign had helped create a community of fourteen:

> I feel that this particular piece of work is a very interesting illustration of Bahá'í cooperation in that Ruth Moffett first attracted the believers, Annie Romer taught them with great devotion and effectiveness and then the final little push I was able to give them which brought them through. I feel that this is an example of the type of thing which we ought to do more and more—the working out of the Bahá'í team method. (Ives, 28 October 1942)

Another similarity among several of the Bahá'í teachers using the teaching campaign method, particularly Ruth Moffett and Mabel Ives, is that they were best in approaching the better educated and more intellectual segment of society. Ruth Moffett was faced with this problem in trying to establish Bahá'í communities in Wyoming in 1937. Wyoming had only two cities over 8500 in population, and its inhabitants were mainly ranchers or railroad and oil workers who were largely uneducated. Moffett, however, said that she worked best with educators, scientists, schools, colleges, and clubs (Moffett, 12 October 1937).

Homefront Settlement

The third teaching method—achieving the local spiritual assembly goal through settlement of homefront pioneers[3]—was a relatively new concept for the North American Bahá'í community. Bahá'ís had long been opening new localities to the Bahá'í Faith by moving there, but this was usually done by individual decision. Most of the organized teaching work up to then had been done by traveling teachers who would teach in a locality for a relatively short period of time and would then move on to new areas. To ask Bahá'ís to move to a locality to settle there for years or even permanently was a newer concept, which Shoghi Effendi had been gradually stressing during the 1930s (NTC 1934 Annual Report). To form new local spiritual assemblies largely by moving Bahá'ís was also a new concept, one that some Bahá'ís found difficult to accept. Part of the growing stress on pioneering by the National Teaching Committee was due to the slowness of achieving the local spiritual assembly goal. As the committee explained to Emogene Hoagg:

> We realize that there has been considerable objection to the method of establishing Assemblies by settlement but I know you realize that at the rate we progressed for the first five years in the Seven Year Plan, it would have taken us 70 years to have achieved the goal. The Guardian himself urged settlement and he has continued to encourage it every step of the way. I know you will be interested in the following quotation from a letter to two of the friends in the South on this very point; "It is interesting to note that no sooner had believers sacrificed themselves by moving to ***** to make up the number for an Assembly than new souls became confirmed and the Cause made a leap forward there! Such things should be a lesson to the friends everywhere in sacrifice and cooperation, perseverance and faith…." Now that you have your Assembly [the NTC continued] we know that together you will work out a plan which will constantly broaden the base of your community and confirm local people who are familiar with the history and ways of the South. (Letter of 7 December 1943)

Instead of developing new teachers to carry on the intensive teaching campaign methods of Rexford, Ives, and Moffett, the National Teaching Committee relied on a combination of settlers and circuit teachers to stimulate local teaching and enrollments in the goal communities. The highpoint in these activities was in 1942–1943 when they recruited 105 of the 270 pioneers who settled in homefront goals during the Seven-Year Plan (*Bahá'í World* 9: 209, 214). However, the National Teaching Committee still felt that they were fighting what they regarded as a general apathy among the Bahá'ís regarding teaching and pioneering. This situation was worsened by a grave shortage of funds (NTC, 12 November. 1941). To increase the number of Bahá'ís able to homefront pioneer, the National Teaching Committee also encouraged Bahá'ís to move shorter distances to those goal communities that were near larger Bahá'í communities. These settlers would not have to give up or change their jobs, just their place of residence.

Besides recruiting the pioneers, the National Teaching Committee had two problems with making the settlement plan work. One was to broaden the base of each new community beyond the pioneers to include a growing number of native believers. The second was to keep the pioneers in place long enough to allow the local community to grow and strengthen. Most of the new communities were still very small and vulnerable to the departure of even a few Bahá'ís. The problem of jeopardized local spiritual assemblies among the goal localities plagued the National Teaching Committee. This problem became particularly severe by 1943. Pioneers felt that once a community had nine Bahá'ís they were free to leave, but this thinking undermined the consolidation process. The National Teaching Committee felt that it took three or four years of work for a local spiritual assembly to be firmly established, and the experience and stability of the older Bahá'ís, were needed in this process (NTC, 31 January 1943). As Leroy loas wrote to Shoghi Effendi on 13 June 1943:

> Many of the pioneers, now that an Assembly has been formed in the city to which they went, would like to go on to further virgin areas, to gain further victories for the Faith. However, it is most important they remain at their posts until, a sufficiently large number of new Bahá'ís have come into the Faith in the given city to insure the steady development of the Assembly, and its vigorous functioning as a strong Bahá'í institution.

Ioas went on to state that of the eighteen new local spiritual assemblies formed in virgin territories, eleven had only nine Bahá'ís in their community; four had eleven; and three had twelve or more.

The homefront local spiritual assembly goal was won at the last moment when, in March, 1944, the last three local spiritual assemblies were formed in Canada. But the NTC could not rest on its laurels, for the newly formed local communities were still nearly all very small and weak. Only one or two assemblies had more than fifteen Bahá'ís in its community. Therefore, to carry out Shoghi Effendi's instructions to consolidate and expand these newly won victories, the National Teaching Committee continued to have to recruit and send settlers to many of the Seven-Year Plan goal localities. In November, 1944, the National Teaching Committee wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly to report on their difficulties and to ask for another appeal for Bahá'ís to move to the critical localities. The NTC listed eighteen local spiritual assemblies that were in danger of being lost. The NTC also proposed that a program be developed to assist new local spiritual assemblies in dealing with their problems, which were being made worse by their inexperience (NTC, 6 November 1944). In late 1944, the National Teaching Committee barely saved the Little Rock, Arkansas Spiritual Assembly by having two veteran pioneers, Reszi Sunshine (d. 1970) and Kathryn Frankland (1872–1963), move there. This move, together with a timely visit by Amelia Collins (1873–1962), sufficiently reinforced the activities of the local Bahá'ís. Thus, while the American Bahá'í community had been victorious in the important task of developing an infrastructure of local spiritual assemblies and communities covering all regions of the United States and Canada, the infrastructure was still weak in the newly opened territories. It proved difficult to build strong communities. Some states, like South Carolina, had still not developed a base of strong local communities by the early l970s, and this weakness greatly handicapped later teaching activities there.

Conclusions

There has been little historical analysis of Bahá'í teaching methods and successes, either geographically or by time period. Published works on Bahá'í teaching activities or methods have been sparse.[4] Therefore, it has not been possible in this article to compare the North American first Seven-Year Plan with other countries or time periods. This article covered only a small sample of historical examples of Bahá'í teaching methods. The geographical area was only two countries and the time period only seven years, so it is not possible to draw any definite conclusions about the nature of Bahá'í teaching methods. There are also other aspects of teaching that were not analyzed, such as the social and economic background of both Bahá'í teacher and inquirer, the content of the Bahá'í teachings being given, and the nature of the localities being opened (i.e., urban or rural). One can only draw some tentative conclusions and point the Way to areas where further research is needed.

In summary, the following points can be made. First, the National Teaching Committee in the 1930s stressed the responsibility of each individual Bahá'í to do more teaching, and they developed the fireside method as a way to encourage Bahá'ís to find ways of teaching that they were comfortable with and good at doing. As part of this effort, the NTC encouraged local communities to hold classes to train local Bahá'ís to present the Bahá'í Faith effectively to their friends and relatives. The lack of teaching and especially enrollments by the rank-and-file Bahá'í has always been a major problem of the American Bahá'í community and continues to be one today. How can one make every individual Bahá'í an effective teacher? Are there teaching stereotypes? Perhaps one stereotype would be that teaching must be done in public and with strangers to be considered teaching. Yet historically, much of the most effective teaching has been with those one knows, such as family members, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. This type of teaching has advantages, as one knows the likes and dislikes of friends and relatives, and so can teach with wisdom. The friends and relatives are interested in that Bahá'í and can see the impact of the Bahá'í Faith on that individual's life and character. The Bahá'í has contact with them on a regular basis and can do effective follow-up work.

Second, in the teaching project section, Mabel Ives has shown that there are different types of teachers—those who work best with public presentations and with strangers, those who are effective in answering people's questions and helping them to study the Bahá'í Faith in depth, and those who work well in fostering unity in a community and in helping to integrate the new believers. These different types of teachers complement each other and should work as teams. Mabel Ives's work in places like Moncton, New Brunswick, and Memphis, Tennessee, shows the difficulties in consolidation and how lack of progress in this area can undermine the advances made in expansion.

There is a need for more study of community development and its relationship to individual development and teaching. Does the collective Bahá'í group also teach by example and thereby strengthen or weaken the teaching efforts of the individual local believer? Does the unity or disunity of a community affect the enrollment rate? How does the level and variety of local activities help in the development within the new believer of the qualities of a distinctive Bahá'í life, qualities that are necessary if the new believer is to be an effective teacher? Does a Bahá'í community need a critical mass (i.e., size, perhaps forty to fifty people) to enable it to start growing through its own teaching resources and efforts and not rely on imported ones?

The larger Bahá'í community, with its greater resources, can have a better balance of types of teachers than can a small community. thereby allowing it to grow and consolidate internally without having to rely primarily on outside teaching or consolidation teams. This diversity of local activities that a larger community usually possesses can have several benefits. It would allow individual believers to find more easily the area of Bahá'í service best suited to their own abilities, talents, and interests. It would also lessen the chance that Bahá'ís become bored with their local community.

Third, the discussion on homefront settlement illustrated the value to the teaching work of Bahá'ís moving to new localities, either permanently or through their travels. From an administrative perspective, the homefront settlement goals showed the importance of specific objectives in focusing individual efforts and increasing their effectiveness through unified work. The homefront goals, like the other goals of the Seven-Year Plan, were skilfully used by Shoghi Effendi to keep the American Bahá'í community focused on the teaching work and kept people informed of the progress made and those tasks which still needed to be accomplished. The homefront settlements and the teaching teams section both illustrated the vital role played in the teaching work by native believers. Native believers are basically those that have grown up in a particular community and are thereby familiar with its culture and who are often trusted and respected by the rest of the community. This terminology applies to majority and not just minority groups; to the wealthy as well as the poor. Importation of Bahá'ís into a community will only take root when sufficient numbers of active, committed native believers are enrolled into the Bahá'í Faith. This process often requires persistence and constant follow up, even over a period of years.

Finally, all three sections illustrate the crucial role of the spiritual qualities of the effective Bahá'í teachers of the past and how they had so internalized the Bahá'í Faith that they could naturally and effortlessly use the principles and history of the Bahá'í Faith in handling any situation or addressing or solving any problem or question, from a personal problem to racism.

Notes

1. Originally, the United States and Canada formed one national Bahá'í community. In 1948, Canada elected its own National Spiritual Assembly.

2. Originally, "fireside" was the Bahá'í term used when Bahá'ís invited one or more friends to their homes with the purpose of discussing the Bahá'í Faith. Later it took on aspects of a public meeting with a speaker and audience.

3. "Pioneer" is the Bahá'í term for a Bahá'í who moves to a new locality with the express purpose of telling people about the Bahá'í Faith.

4. Standard introductory works on the Bahá'í Faith, like *The Babi and Baha'i Religions* by Peter Smith and *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* by William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, have general overviews of the spread of the Bahá'í Faith and general discussions on methods of expansion and consolidation.

Two books discussing teaching methods using personal examples are *A Manual for Pioneers* by Ruhíyyih Rabbani and *Teaching the Bahá’í Faith: Spirit in Action* by Nathan Rutstein. One Ph.D. dissertation, “The Growth and Spread of the Bahá’í Faith” by Arthur Hampson, contains a detailed analysis of expansion, although the author had access to only a limited number of statistics.

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