

AUSTRALIAN Baha'i Report

Volume 7, Issue 1 - August 2003

A newsletter
of the
Australian
Bahá'í
community

INSIDE

2003 National
Bahá'í Convention

3



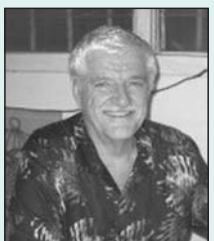
Reflection Open to All

6



Service in the
Solomons Recognised

7



Celebration of Service

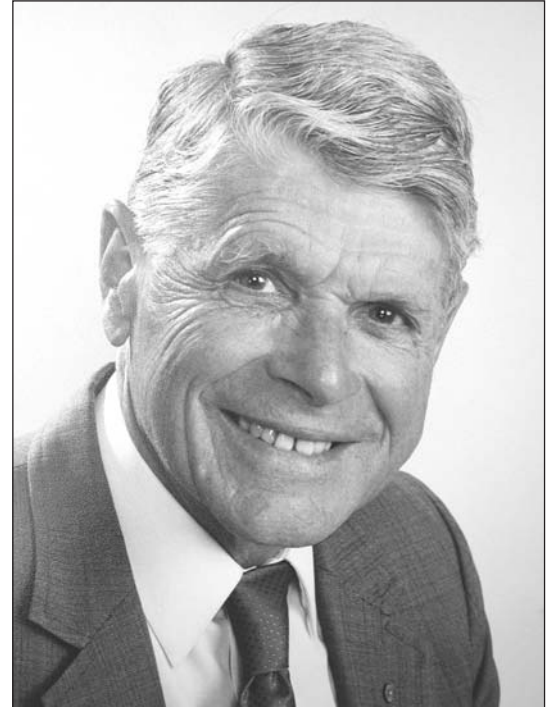
Sir Ronald Wilson, speaking in Perth recently, stated that community service "provides the antidote to a selfish society and thereby an antidote to depression and suicide". The address was given by the former High Court judge at a public meeting that coincided with the 2003 Bahá'í National Convention. Given at Government House to an audience of over five hundred, his speech was replete with references to the Bahá'í Writings and a rich array of Christian and secular sources.

Speaking on the topic, 'The Celebration of Service,' Sir Ronald Wilson identified some elements necessary for service. The capacity to discern the needs of others is required. He noted an inspired imagination, love and fellowship are needed to develop this capacity and that the highest form of service is that which encourages a spirit of reciprocity between the giver and receiver. Service must be offered with humility he observed.

"It is an inspired imagination that enables one to see into the depth of the other" stated Sir Ronald. "Service at its best will encourage a spirit of mutuality where that person who is served will want to respond in service to the other thereby promoting the fruits of fellowship."

He gave as an example of this spirit of mutuality the story of a highly respected member of the church who Sir Ronald visited in hospital. This man had rendered many services throughout his distinguished life and was always available to help others in need. However, now he was in need of the service of others. He confessed to Sir Ronald the difficulty this presented him, a man unaccustomed to receiving help of any kind. The period in hospital taught him the need and value of not only giving service but receiving it as well.

"The impulse to service must be grounded in humility lest it be an occasion for pride and condescension" said Sir Ronald. He then pointed to the importance of community service and asserted that, "The corporate dimension provides



"... Every one of us from our very humanity is called to serve. It is a mark of our human nature..."

Sir Ronald Wilson

the antidote to a selfish society and thereby an antidote to depression and suicide and I mention particularly the problems of young people in an affluent society."

He concluded by calling the attention of the audience to the fact that service is not something that comes naturally. "Service must be a product of our own will... Every one of us from our very humanity is called to serve. It is a mark of our human nature. We are made for fellowship. We are made for the company of others and we best promote that fellowship and company by attending to the needs of the others in a spirit of service. ...This does call for sacrifice, even at the most elementary level of time."



Child-Development Centred Communities

Any healthy society concerns itself with the needs of its young. Bahá'ís reflect the interest of Australians generally in the welfare of children and youth. This was the subject of much consultation at the recent National Bahá'í Convention in Perth.

Discussion concentrated on the concept of 'child-development centred' communities. These communities see the development of children as a central focus of community life. Children are regarded as a vital component and are active participants, alongside adults, in developing healthy, vibrant communities. They are perceived as integral to the whole community - not a segment that is ignored. They should be both seen and heard in every element of community life in a manner which takes into account their stage of development.

Education both in the material and spiritual sense is essential in a child-development centred community, as is the opportunity for children to serve others through a role in the decision

making process and acts of service. The Bahá'í community provides spiritual education through the Bahá'í religious education classes in government schools and out of school classes. Delegates discussed issues relating to support for the teachers of these classes, such as training and resource development.

However spiritual education does not only occur in the classroom. Parents and the community also provide guidance and education which will equip children to develop into mature adults who make a positive contribution to society. Spiritual parenting courses, inspired by the Bahá'í Writings, were the subject of much interest and encouragement from the delegates.

The concept of a 'child-development centred' community is still evolving. This work is carried out at the grass roots in communities around the country. The National Convention provided an opportunity for Bahá'ís to share their experiences and develop this model further.

Youth Year of Service

The role of youth in the Bahá'í community was evident at the 'Celebration of Service', a programme open to all that was held on one of the evenings during the period of the Bahá'í National Convention. Government House in Perth resounded to the voices of the New Era choir, Artworks Visual Arts Theatre and other dance groups. All of these performing groups were initiated by Bahá'ís and the majority of the performers are youth.

During the evening, Leslie Ochwada, 24, from Perth, related his experience on youth year of service to Vanuatu. He said, "My personal experience of service has been one of unexpected and undeserved rewards. These rewards far outweighed any perceived sacrifices that I may have made... I was immediately dispatched to the hastily constructed classrooms to teach the local children how to read and write. This was a reflection of the great need that existed in that village." He continued, "Not only did I develop the capacity to be able to stand before you here today. But I was also blessed with the opportunity to witness the joy on a child's face, as she

understood something for the first time. Each and every one of those children has left a mark on my heart that shall never be wiped away."

Youth are perceived by Bahá'ís as agents of change. They are encouraged to use the vibrancy and creativity which are hallmarks of their age-group to serve others. This is expressed in a programme called the youth year of service. Generally done after the completion of high school, the youth do unpaid volunteer work under the supervision of a Bahá'í community. Quite often the youth travel to another country or region of Australia and are thereby able to experience a different culture during the year.

Parents often remark about how transformed their children are on their return from youth year of service. This year helps youth develop responsibility, resourcefulness and maturity. They use these newly found qualities in every facet of their life. Hence the benefits of the youth year of service programme are not just felt during the year the service is completed. Patterns of behaviour are developed which stay with the youth for the rest of their lives.

2003 Bahá'í National Convention

Perth welcomed 95 delegates to the Bahá'í National Convention for 2003. Local communities from all over Australia elected delegates to attend the Convention. Some delegates came from major metropolitan centres while others came from rural areas. Others such as those from North Queensland and the Torres Strait had travelled great distances to attend.

These annual conventions fulfil two purposes: One is to consult on matters of importance to the Bahá'í community; the other is to elect the new National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, the governing body of the Bahá'ís of Australia.

The National Convention discussed the continuing progress of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia particularly in the areas of education, needs of children and youth, gender equality, and how the Australian Bahá'í Community can help to address some of the current issues faced by Australian society. Bahá'ís try to serve humanity and seek to meet the needs of

the community in which they live. The Bahá'í Writings provide the guiding principles by which Bahá'ís seek to live their lives. Through consultation with others, Bahá'ís try to apply the principles of the Bahá'í Faith to meet their own needs and those of others in society. This process is ongoing as the requirements of society are continually evolving.

The members elected to the National Spiritual Assembly were: Stephen Hall, Fiona McDonald, John Walker, Fariborz Moshirian, Bijan Samali, Marjorie Tidman, Eric Kingston, John Davidson and Vahid Saberi. The Convention warmly thanked retiring members, Philip Obah and Naysan Faizi for their services. Since the Convention there has been another change to the membership of the National Spiritual Assembly with the resignation of Stephen Hall and subsequent election of Kath Podger.



Featuring the public evening was a convention highlight

Women and Men Working Together

Over the past year the Office for Equality, an agency of the Australian Bahá'í Community, has been working on several exciting and challenging new projects. These projects all promote the concept of gender equality and seek ways to raise awareness of equality and build a unity of vision between men and women.

An empowerment program called 'Equal Wings' that was developed in Malaysia and tested widely in Asia, the Pacific and Africa, was piloted in Melbourne. Men and women, couples and singles using drama, small group consultations, interactive exercises and humour participated in the initial workshops. Very different results were produced when men and women were separated to work through similar worksheets. Once the different issues had been discussed and clarified, men and women then joined in the same workshops. The pilot proved that with minor modification, "Equal Wings" is suitable in a developed urban environment and that men and women who complete the workshops become more aware and more inspired to work towards building positive relationships between the sexes. The program will be run in Adelaide in September.

Another successful equality program called 'Equality Leads to Unity' was held in two states to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of the issues around equality, to develop tools and strategies for increasing equality in local communities and to provide opportunities for networking. Presentations were made on topics such as "Equality from a Multicultural Perspective" and "Equality from a Youth Perspective". A key component of the workshops were a cause and effect exercise, which addressed the question - "What are the barriers that prevent us from achieving greater equality"? This exercise assisted participants to identify the main causes of inequality in local communities and the effects this has on the development society. The workshop will next be run in an area with a large indigenous population.

Throughout its work the Office identified a need for a leadership program for women that develops competencies in leadership. In the process of developing the program, it has become apparent that it would be more valuable to develop a generic leadership

program that could be adapted for a women's only group if needed. As well as providing for specific skill development, it is envisaged that the program will give men and women a greater understanding of service-oriented leadership and of the qualities and capacities that both sexes can bring to leadership. The program will be piloted in November 2003.

In an effort to introduce the arts into its work the Office has worked with youth in central Australia to prepare an arts based workshop on equality for the indigenous community. Art has also been used as a means of raising awareness of equality among children and youth.

Another youth initiative, which is currently being developed, is a pilot of the "Happy Hippo Show". Shamil Fattakhov, in the USSR, initially created the "Happy Hippo Show" concept. It uses drama, in which characters are taken to the threshold of an important moral decision, to engage the audience in a discussion of what step the actors should take next. The emphasis is on achieving a positive moral outcome through consultation.

In its initial year, the Office for Equality has had the opportunity to understand through first hand experience how men and women can work together to advance equality. In addition, the pilots of awareness raising activities for men and women have given the Office a sense of optimism about what can be achieved when men and women work in partnership to advance equality. In the next year, the Office will act on this optimism, broadening the scope of its awareness raising activities and begin to address the increased need for education, skills and knowledge that has been created by the pilot programs. As it does so, the Office will continue to undertake its work with the conviction that the unity of the human race depends on the establishment of the equality of men and women.

"Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible." - Abdu'l-Bahá

New CEO for Australian Bahá'í Community

John Walker is the new Chief Executive Officer of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia. The national governing body elected a new CEO following the recent appointment of former Chief Executive Officer, Mr Stephen Hall, to the Bahá'í Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia (see below).

Mr Walker, a certified Practising Accountant and well known businessman from Toowoomba has

been a member of the Bahá'í Faith for over forty years. He has had vast experience in areas of administration, finance and community development, having served on regional and national bodies for many years.

Mr Walker will commence his new role as CEO in early August.

Mr John Walker



Mr Stephen Hall Appointed to Bahá'í Australasian Board of Counsellors

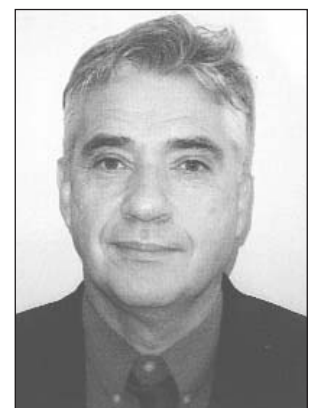
Mr Stephen Hall, former member of the national governing body of the Bahá'ís of Australia and its former elected Chief Executive Officer, has been appointed to the Bahá'í Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia. This Board is a senior Bahá'í advisory body that assists 17 Bahá'í national governing councils (National Spiritual Assemblies) in the Pacific region.

Stephen was a most valued member of the National Spiritual Assembly and contributed greatly in all areas of development, including administration, the community and education.

Prior to his election to the National Spiritual Assembly, Mr Hall had twenty-one years of

experience in the NSW Department of Education, mainly as a School Principal specializing in rural areas. He has also served as a Curriculum Consultant to the Education Department. In his new area of service, Stephen will continue to guide and encourage the ongoing development of Bahá'í Communities in Australia and the Pacific.

The Australian Bahá'í Community deeply appreciates his many years of service as its Chief Executive Officer and wishes him many more years of service in his new role as a Counsellor for the Australasian Bahá'í Communities.



Mr Stephen Hall

Reflection Open to All

Every month about one hundred people gather to rejuvenate their spirits. The venue is the Art Gallery of South Australia, the event is called 'Soul Food' and is open to all. "This is an opportunity to celebrate our unity and diversity, to nurture our souls and to meet in a spirit of friendship", proclaims the brochure inviting people to participate in an uplifting programme focussed on inspirational readings from all Faiths; indigenous, ancient and modern.

Each Soul Food has a theme. Renewal, Reconciliation - A Song of Understanding, Only a Child are some of the themes that have been chosen. The readings are not restricted to those of religious origin. Poetry, excerpts from notable speeches and sometimes short stories are also included. Soul Food organisers believe that their hour of inspiration is a time to nurture and revive the spirit. Live music, tasteful decorations and visual imagery to support the readings is a feature of the event and reflects the commitment of the organisers to support local artists.

Around Australia, Bahá'ís are offering devotional services like Soul Food in a variety of venues ranging from private homes to public halls and universities. Always focussing on the inspirational writings of the world's religions, each service is a unique experience shaped by

the theme chosen and the creativity of the organisers.

Devotional meetings such as Soul Food are organised by Bahá'ís all around Australia. They all provide a reflective atmosphere which refreshes the spirit and are offered by the Bahá'ís as a gift to all Australians.

Soul Food in Action - Peace for Evermore

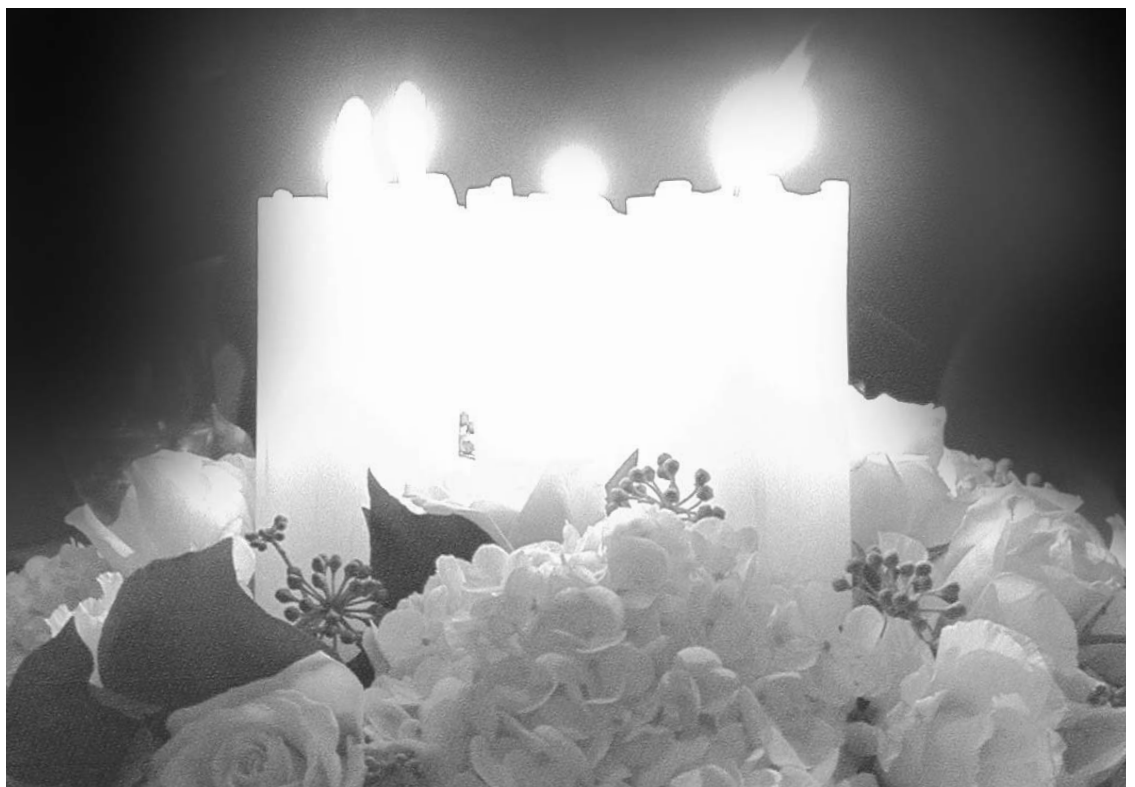
The audience sat absorbed in the stories enacted before them. A war story from Cambodia, a story of survival from Africa, the account of a Bahá'í woman from Iran -all captured the spirit of Peace for Evermore. On the same programme a short video was shown which was produced especially for this event.

Creativity and involvement with the community are hallmarks of Soul Food. Peace for Evermore was the theme for programme that was conducted as part of Celebrating Cultural Diversity Week held each year in Adelaide.

The video and performance of the short stories were also shown at the UNESCO - APNIEV (Asia Pacific Network for International and Value Education) conference held in Adelaide the following week. The conference venue was decorated by the organisers of Soul Food.



*Fanning the flames:
Soul Food is a time to
'nurture and revive
the spirit'*



Bahá'ís Honoured

Reflecting the diversity of recipients of the Centenary Medal, five Bahá'ís were among those honoured for their contribution to Australian society.

Judith Light from Lismore in northern New South Wales was recognised for her service to Aborigines and the reconciliation process.

Judith has been the co-ordinator of Lismore People for Reconciliation since its inception about seven years ago, founder and co-ordinator of the local Reconciliation Choir, member of the local Australia Day Committee and Aboriginal Advisory Committee and member of the local NAIDOC committee.

Like Judith, Farvardin Daliri's award also recognises his service to the community at the grass roots. Farvardin is the manager of the Townsville Migrant Resource Centre and is well known in North Queensland for his work with the many different people and organisations that comprise Australian society. He is cited for his, "service to the ethnic community through the Migrant Resource Centre".

Since 1995, Farvardin has been the event organiser of a major annual multi-cultural event called Cultural Fest. With an estimated involvement of 45,000 people from the region last year, it has not only engaged people from a minority background, but mainstream Australians as well.

The former chief executive officer of the Australian Bahá'í Community, Stephen Hall, has been recognised for his "services to society through the Bahá'í Faith". Lailani Mirkazemi of Hobart received the medal for her work as a member of the Regional Bahá'í Council of Tasmania.

Soheil Abedian from the Gold Coast was awarded the Centenary Medal for his services to the development and construction industry. A fellow of the Urban Development Institute of Australia and president of the Gold Coast Branch, Soheil has much experience in urban development in Victoria and south-east Queensland.



Top (left to right): Peter Lindsay MP presenting Centenary Medal to Farvardin Daliri

Centre: Judith Light and Friends

Bottom: Soheil Abedian

Service in the Solomons Recognised.

Bruce Saunders, an Australian living in the Solomon Islands has received an OBE for service to the community and business in the Solomon Islands.

Mr Saunders is currently chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Solomon Islands. For 10 years, he served as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Australasia, a senior Bahá'í advisory body that assists 17 Bahá'í national governing councils (National Spiritual Assemblies).

Mr Saunders studied the catering industry. He and his wife, Keithie, moved to the Cook Islands to assist the Bahá'í community there.

Two and a half years later, in 1968, they went to the Solomon Islands to help with the family business after the death of Mrs Saunders' father. They have lived there ever since.

One of the most prominent businessmen in the country, Mr Saunders has interests, often with his wife, in a range of commercial areas, such

as in food, insurance, real estate, tourism, exports and handicrafts.

Mr Saunders is the only expatriate member of the city council of Honiara, the country's capital. He has been appointed to the position for the past six years by the Minister of Home Affairs. Mr Saunders also assists in the attempts to preserve the forests of the country and in the promotion of solar energy.

He has been vice-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and a member of a Government consultative body which interacted between the people and the Government.

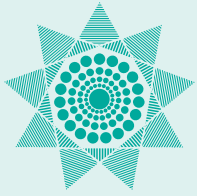
He has also been on the board of Rotary International, a foundation member of the Lions club, and a member of other organizations.

Mr Saunders has been closely involved in the development of a civil society network.

- Bahá'í World News Service

OBE Recipient - Bruce Saunders





*is a newsletter
published by the
Australian Bahá'í
community.*

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any aspect of the Australian
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Community

South America to Construct New Bahá'í Temple

A temple of light is to grace the continent of South America.

The international governing body of the Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice, has appointed Siamak Hariri of Toronto, Canada, as architect of the Bahá'í Temple (also known as a House of Worship) to be built near Santiago in Chile.

Mr Hariri said he hopes to complete the project within the next three years.

After considering 185 submissions the Universal House of Justice selected four teams based on the creativity of their designs and asked for further developments or additional concepts. It then selected the design by Mr Hariri.

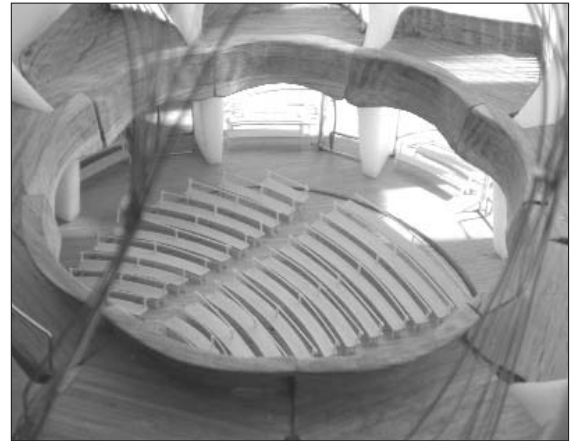
The Temple will be built outside Santiago on the Pan-American Highway. Funding for the construction will be provided by voluntary donations from the Bahá'ís of Chile and from local and national Bahá'í communities around the world.

Many Australians are familiar with the Bahá'í Temple in Sydney which is a well-known landmark. Located at Ingleside on the outskirts of Sydney it is surrounded by natural bushland. The temple attracts visitors from around the world who appreciate the peaceful and serene atmosphere. Australia is one of seven countries in the world that hosts a Bahá'í Temple. The other countries where Bahá'í Temples are located are: Germany, India, Panama, Uganda, United States, and Western Samoa. The House of Worship in the United States was the first one of these to be dedicated, in 1953. The most recently completed was the Indian Temple, in 1986. Bahá'í Houses of Worship are open to all. In the future, each Temple will be the central feature in a complex designed to provide social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits.

- Bahá'í World News Service



*Birds Eye View of the top of the
new Bahá'í Temple for Chile*



Inside the Temple of Wings



The Temple will be translucent at night