



PERTH CLUSTER REFLECTION MEETING

12 December 2021 - Cycle 3

“For the present hour, we urge you to recommit your energies, keeping your focus on the mission immediately before you. We are immensely gratified to see the assured composure with which the community of the Greatest Name has sought to offer the divine remedy under all conditions, especially during this period when society’s established patterns of life have been disrupted and risks of different kinds are being faced by so many.”

25 November 2020, Universal House of Justice

PROGRAM

- 09.00 a.m. Welcome & devotions
- Introductory remarks by ABM
- 09.30 a.m. Reflecting on the achievements of the cluster
- Cluster narrative for Cycle 3 and review of statistics
- *Groupings of families*
 - *Reach and progress of the institute*
- 09.45 a.m. Sharing insights and lessons learned
- Centenary commemorations in groupings
- *Armadale*
 - *East Victoria Park*
- Expansion phase helping neighbourhoods move forward
- *Kensington*
 - *Armadale*
- 10.30 a.m. Break and refreshments
- 10.50 a.m. Study, discussions, and planning in small groups – The Expansion Phase
- *What can intensification during the expansion phase look like in the settings we serve?*
 - *How can capacity raised by participation in the Institute courses be directed towards teaching efforts in your grouping or neighbourhood?*
 - *What opportunities exist for your team to expand the efforts of your group or neighbourhood? What obstacles need to be removed, or assistance be provided?*
- 11.40 a.m. Summer period
- 11.50 a.m. The future direction of Cluster Reflection Meetings
- 12.00 p.m. Closing prayer

Reflecting on the achievements of the cluster - Perth Cluster Cycle 3 Narrative

Groupings of Families and Households

At the outset of this One-Year Plan, the Area Teaching Committee engaged in a learning process on how groupings of families and households can become the nucleus of a vibrant community whose members are engaged in a profound and evolving conversation aimed towards the betterment of their society. The Area Teaching Committee has been mapping out with Local Spiritual Assemblies what natural groupings have formed over the years in their community, and which potential new groupings could exist, as well as identifying one or two 'initiators' for each grouping. These initiators organise spaces for consultation and reflection with their grouping around their activities.

The Area Teaching Committee has so far visited 19 Local Spiritual Assemblies and Registered Groups and mapped out approximately 160 groupings, with plans to embrace the entirety of the cluster before the end of the One-Year Plan. Out of these 160, around 40 are connected to this system of support. Depending on the number of groupings, at least two collaborators from each community are connected to all the groupings in their area. Once a cycle the team gathers with the collaborators to consult and reflect on questions such as how initiators could be supported, learn from each other, and develop on their path. The team is also learning about how to identify, orient and accompany collaborators effectively. The team is learning alongside initiators of experienced groups, who will in turn support initiators of emerging groups as they gain more confidence.

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	TOTAL	TARGET FOR END OF PLAN
Number of Local Assemblies and registered groups visited	4	8	7	19	26
Number of existing groupings mapped out and new groupings formed	27	63	70	160	300
Number of collaborators connected to support network	5	15	20	40	52 (2 per community)

Reach and Progress of the Institute

There are currently a number of small settings in which a team is offering Baha'u'llah's Revelation to the life of a neighbourhood, empowering an increasing number of friends to take ownership of the community-building process. As these neighbourhoods are learning about very similar things, a pattern has been established of gathering key tutors, animators, and children's class teachers from these neighbourhoods twice each cycle to capture and share insights and connect these friends to one learning process. These gatherings have focused on three main objects of learning:

- 1. How can the capacity for learning be advanced?*
- 2. How can we offer educational content with quality? How does this quality help us to extend the reach and impact of the programs, to engage 50-100 junior youth, raise a cadre of tutors and engage the children of the neighbourhood in a program for their spiritual education?*
- 3. How can the system of capturing and sharing learnings evolve to assist the teams in advancing the process in small settings?*

Furthermore, experienced collaborators from the neighbourhoods themselves have begun organising these spaces, ensuring that the spaces are as relevant as possible to the work of expansion and consolidation.

Of the 129 study circles in Perth, 41 (32%) are in the 7 neighbourhoods that have the strongest connections to the system of support. The hope is that over summer the reach of this system of support can grow to encapsulate a majority of activities in the cluster. In terms of the Program for the Spiritual Education of Children in neighbourhood settings, more than 50% of all teachers have been connected to a system of support and so far, 4 neighbourhoods have been identified as having the 'program firmly established', implying there are at least 3 classes running at least 3 grades. The system of support for the JYSEP is still in its early days, however, a collaborative group has begun meeting to start thinking about the structures that will allow the animators to connect to the learning process across the cluster.

Sharing insights and lessons learned

Centenary Commemorations

Significantly, this cycle saw the Centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the cluster engaged in a profound reflection on Baha'u'llah's "most excellent handiwork", the "Perfect Exemplar of His teachings". There were a combined 175 commemorations throughout the cluster, engaging 2676 people. As the Universal House of Justice states, the purpose of these Commemorations was "not only to honour the memory of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to recall His trials and triumphs, but also, with us, to rededicate yourselves and the communities you represent to earnestly serving the Cause to which He devoted His very existence." As we move into summer, it will be exciting to see how the fruits of this special period blossom. Below are accounts from 2 localities and the insights that they gained over the commemorations in groupings.

ARMADALE

The Armadale Community decided to have a two-week celebration of the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, calling it 'A Festival for 'Abdu'l-Bahá'. The community embarked on a prayer campaign of the Tablet of Visitation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to permeate all our activities with Divine blessings. With so much artistic talent in the small community, a musical play 'A Holy Man' was written and staged to engage community members of all ages and backgrounds to launch the Festival with its aim to attract seekers through the arts. With its gold-coin donation and sale of mugs designed by the youth inspired by quotes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we were able to gift to charity a sizable donation, following in the footsteps of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

After the last cluster reflection meetings, the Local Assembly consulted with the rest of the community about having numerous small commemorations in the various groupings identified, as encouraged by the agencies and institutions. A challenge quickly arose as some friends were part of several groupings and felt torn as to which grouping commemoration to attend. In addition, some community members wanted a combined commemoration to honour 'Abdu'l-Bahá. After understanding that holding commemorations in small settings came from institutional guidance, the community quickly rallied. The Local Assembly mapped out all families into three main groupings ensuring that all families and households of both Baha'i friends and friends of the Faith were connected to a grouping. This was done mostly through geographic settings or natural connections. As a community, we are pleased to note that commemorating through groupings has had results that we did not even foresee:

- The groupings had a more focussed approach in accompanying the friends of the Faith, or friends that were not well connected to the community. No one fell off the radar, so the reach and engagement of the friends increased significantly. The night of the ascension alone attracted 53 participants, 9 of whom were friends of the Faith, which was a significant achievement, especially for a commemoration that ended after 1 am. The groupings have increased from 5 to 8 (now including 3 family groupings connecting everyone) with 27 families/households (from 8 in cycle 1) connecting to 86 people, including 40 Friends of the Faith in Armadale only.

- For some of the newly formed groupings, this occasion provided the opportunity for them to plan and reflect together for the first time, thus strengthening the functioning of those groupings of friends.
- The new neighbourhood of Piara Waters and Harrisdale had their first gathering as whole families with plans for ongoing devotional meetings.
- During the night of the commemorations, the various groupings shared photos and messages through the community WhatsApp group which generated a sense of connectivity and excitement.

For some, it was an honour to have this opportunity to host this momentous event. One Baha'i reminisced: *"It was 27th November 1971, I met members of the Baha'i community for the first time in Malaysia at a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I was not a Baha'i and did not know anything about the Faith then. Last night I had the privilege of hosting one of 3 separate gatherings held in my Baha'i community of Armadale to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Abdu'l-Bahá. Thank you to all who led me on that journey and kept me on the path."*

In addition to these three main commemorations planned for the night of the commemoration, the other groupings planned other activities to be commemorated at other times. The initiators visited members of the groupings who could not attend the night of the commemoration and held devotions, children's classes or screening of 'Exemplar'. The children farewelled the year with a picnic and performances dedicated to 'Abdu'l-Baha, and the youth planned a hike with prayers at the peak.

Some of the reflections following the commemorations in groupings was that events in groupings are cosier and more spiritual, allowing those attending to get to know each other better. It is easier to host a devotional in a small group, for example in one grouping, two new friends volunteered to host devotional meetings. Friends of the Faith and believers alike, touched by the spirit of the commemorations, have shown interest in being involved in other core activities. One Baha'i friend who only rarely attended Baha'i gatherings asked if her two children could attend children's classes next year. Friends also learnt first-hand that when we start small, momentum can build, and this is often the way to growth. Perhaps most importantly, groupings increased the number of participants and gave a sense of ownership to many, many more than usual in one large gathering. Using the grouping strategy helped to encourage universal participation.

EAST VICTORIA PARK

In the last several months, some friends who are involved in the neighbourhood's devotional gatherings and study circles have been joining in the weekly neighbourhood reflection meeting from time to time. When it was time to consult about the Centenary commemorations, two of these friends were present, in addition to the core team members. Together, we studied the 25 November 2020 message of the Universal House of Justice, discussing the significance of the Holy Day, its relationship with the community building process in the neighbourhood, and the two films we were anticipating to be released. We consulted and decided that a commemoration would be held in the neighbourhood at the home of one of these friends, who was at that time studying Book 1. A program for the evening was agreed on, and a list of invitees was drawn up. Over the next couple of months, this nucleus of friends revisited the plans several times and reflected on the progress they were making with inviting others to commemorate the Holy Day with us.

On the evening of 26th November at 6 pm, 10 friends gathered: 6 friends of the Faith and 4 Bahá'ís. One of the friends was only able to stay for dinner, but the rest continued. Before dinner, one of the friends present suggested that we say a prayer before eating, and several of the attendees offered words of thanksgiving for the occasion of coming together, and one Baha'i prayer was read. After dinner and dessert, we watched Exemplar, which was followed by a lively discussion. The friends remarked on how inspiring 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life was, and each shared aspects of His words and actions that they personally were touched by and would like to emulate. One of the friends there mentioned that she recognised 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a prophet, and another requested to have a Baha'i prayer book. At this point, two of the participants retired for the evening, and the rest of us (now 4 Bahá'ís and 3 friends) went for a walk and then took some more dessert and tea together. Around 12:30 am, we sat and shared prayers together, and we were delighted that our friends felt very comfortable contributing prayers according to their own customs (a Christian reciting the Lord's Prayer and a Muslim reading Qur'anic passages). We finished by reading the Tablet of Visitation at 1:00 am, ending a delightful 7 hours of company together!

Expansion phase helping neighbourhoods move forward

The 3rd expansion phase of the One Year Plan (25th September - 10th October) saw over 150 individuals all around Perth contribute in one way or another to the advancement of the community-building process in their locality. These contributions included 7 junior youth camps and 5 institute camps, as well as a number of children's day-camps, family camps and home visits to friends and neighbours. Below are accounts from 2 localities and the insights that they gained over the two weeks.

KENSINGTON

We started the expansion phase on the 26th-27th with Jy camp for the 3 junior youth groups in the neighbourhood, hosted in Byford. The animators were assisted by volunteers with logistics, preparation of food and activities. We then had an institute camp for youth with 15 participants that started on the 1st until the 3rd and were held locally in two homes in Kensington. Study circles included Books 2, 4, 5 and 7, as well as Grade 5 of Book 3 and a book 8 study circle for the tutors. The final event of the expansion phase was our regular children's day camp, hosted at the local primary school. The camp was on the 7th and 8th of October and had a total of 52 participants and 15 youth attending over the 2 days.

The team focused on building more systems within the camp as well as the service aspect of the camp focusing on community engagement. In preparation for day camp, a member of the team met with Cahoots Perth, an organisation that runs holiday programs for children and youth with disabilities. This meeting resulted in Cahoots bringing approximately 10 children to the day camp to participate in activities with the children attending day camp as the service activity for the first day. Reflections from the Cahoots team were that they enjoyed attending our camp space and are interested in organising something in future school holidays. They're even looking for ways to engage multiple of their groups in the program. The camp provided participants with a space to help them practice their social skills - like turn-taking, managing time, socializing. We hope to include the parents' involvement in future day camps.

ARMADALE

Before the expansion phase, it was identified that there was a need to cohere all the efforts and maintain smooth transitions between various activities, as it has previously experienced a drop in participation between transitions such as from children's classes to the junior youth program, or the institute process. Following consultations with the Local Assembly and the community, mostly during the feasts, having holiday camps was identified as one of the strategies to help with the retention and transitions. To establish a systematic pattern of activity whilst not interfering with the existing weekly sessions during the term, short residential junior youth camps were planned for alternate school holidays. A camp team was formed, and a website was set up to help with the management of registrations for those camps, which proved a helpful tool during the pandemic. Relationships with parents were strengthened through the registration process, end-of-camp presentations, and follow-ups for inter-generational neighbourhood core activities.

Over time, it became evident that the space created opportunities for expansion, universal participation, capacity-building, strengthening bonds of friendship, and infused new energy into the pattern of community life. A range of skills of community members could be channelled as the camp program had a good balance between study, worship, service, and social activities. It was heart-warming to see friends who were not engaged in the weekly core activities to find an arena of service, with some friends planning their leave from work around the camps. As a result, the nucleus of friends engaged in community-building activities have expanded and people of all ages and backgrounds are working side by side with such joy, enthusiasm, and creativity. Service projects became more complex, such as building a fire pit and doing a collective mural painting at the campsite.

With more capacity being built through the institute process, more groups have emerged in other neighbourhoods previously linked with Seville Grove. One emerging characteristic has been the camps serving as a space for the junior youth and youth that have graduated from the program to come together and stay connected. The older youth come together to serve as animators to the younger ones, providing a safe space to practice the outcomes of the institute courses with accompaniment from the experienced adults in the community. It has evolved into an enriching space where a network of groups with natural connections have been established, for support and learning from one another. One of the young animators who have been animating for less than a year shared how the space has helped him build his confidence for animating his own group:

"The holiday camp space provides a good change of pace and atmosphere from the typical junior youth sessions that I hold weekly at my household. Getting the opportunity to meet with junior youth who are not part of my group creates a nice blend between my participants and the new ones and creates last longing relationships that carry outside of the camp. It is also exciting to plan and work alongside other animators. I get to learn a lot from them, whether they are new like me or experienced. Trying to complete a junior youth book in a couple of days is always an enjoyable experience and I have learned a lot about the process of animating as a result. This camp setting teaches you a lot about how to run a book more efficiently because you want to get through as much of the content as possible but with sufficient depth and not superficially. I found that these newly acquired skills could be easily transferred into our junior youth group to better enrich the learning environment for the participants. I really look forward to the holiday camps where I get to interact with others outside of our group."

Study, Discussions and Planning

The Expansion Phase

Please read the following questions, then return to discuss them after exploring the following quotations:

- What can intensification during the expansion phase look like in the settings we serve?
- How can capacity raised by participation in the Institute courses be directed towards teaching efforts in your grouping or neighbourhood?
- What opportunities exist for your team to expand the efforts of your group or neighbourhood? What obstacles need to be removed, or assistance be provided?

As progress continues, the rising capacity for meaningful conversation is harnessed in the plans of the institutions. By the time cycles of activity have formally emerged, this capacity is being further stimulated through the expansion phase that does so much to determine the outcome of each cycle. The precise objectives of each expansion phase vary, of course, depending on conditions in the cluster and the circumstances of the Bahá'í community. In some instances, its main aim is to increase participation in the core activities; in others, readiness to enrol in the Faith is discovered. Conversations about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and the purpose of His mission occur in a variety of settings, including firesides and visits to homes. The actions undertaken during this phase allow abilities developed through studying the relevant institute materials to be exercised and refined. As experience grows, the friends become more adept at discerning when they have found a hearing ear, at deciding when to be more direct in sharing the message, at removing obstacles to understanding, and at helping seekers to embrace the Cause. The approach of working in teams allows the friends to serve together, offer mutual support, and build confidence—but even when carrying out actions individually, they are coordinating their efforts to greater effect. Their focus and investment of time endow this short but decisive phase of the cycle with the intensity it demands. This spirit of high resolve serves to multiply the community's powers, and in each cycle the friends learn to depend more and more on the potent confirmations from the divine realm that their actions attract.

29 December 2015, Message of the Universal House of Justice

Therein, then, lies the challenge that must be faced by those in the forefront of the learning process which will continue to advance over the course of the next Plan. Wherever an intensive programme of growth is established, let the friends spare no effort to increase the level of participation. Let them strain every nerve to ensure that the system which they have so laboriously erected does not close in on itself but progressively expands to embrace more and more people. Let them not lose sight of the remarkable receptivity they found—nay, the sense of eager expectation that awaited them—as they gained confidence in their ability to interact with people of all walks of life and converse with them about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation. Let them hold fast to the conviction that a direct presentation of the Faith, when carried out at a sufficient level of depth and reinforced by a sound approach to consolidation, can bring enduring results. And let them not forget the lessons of the past which left no doubt that a relatively small band of active supporters of the Cause, no matter how resourceful, no matter how consecrated, cannot attend to the needs of

communities comprising hundreds, much less thousands, of men, women and children. The implications are clear enough. If, in a cluster, those shouldering responsibility for expansion and consolidation number in the tens, with a few hundred participating in the activities of community life, both figures should rise significantly so that by the end of the Plan, one or two hundred are facilitating the participation of one or two thousand.

28 December 2010, Message of the Universal House of Justice

Finally, a significant advance in culture, one which we have followed with particular interest, is marked by the rise in capacity to think in terms of process. That, from the outset, the believers have been asked to be ever conscious of the broad processes that define their work is apparent from a careful reading of even the earliest communications of the Guardian related to the first national plans of the Faith. However, in a world focused increasingly on the promotion of events, or at best projects, with a mindset that derives satisfaction from the sense of expectation and excitement they generate, maintaining the level of dedication required for long-term action demands considerable effort. The expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í community encompasses a number of interacting processes, each of which contributes its share to the movement of humanity towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order. The lines of action associated with any given process provide for the organization of occasional events, and from time to time, activities take the shape of a project with a clear beginning and a definite end. If, however, events are imposed on the natural unfoldment of a process, they will disrupt its sound evolution. If the projects undertaken in a cluster are not made subordinate to the explicit needs of the processes unfolding there, they will yield little fruit.

28 December 2010, Message of the Universal House of Justice

Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God. From the beginning of the sequence of courses, a participant encounters Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in considering such weighty themes as worship, service to humanity, the life of the soul, and the education of children and youth. As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one's understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. These capacities are visible not only in the elevated discussions that increasingly characterize interactions within the community, but in the ongoing conversations that reach well beyond—not least between the Bahá'í youth and their peers—extending to include parents whose daughters and sons are benefiting from the community's programmes of education. Through exchanges of this kind, consciousness of spiritual forces is raised, apparent dichotomies yield to unexpected insights, a sense of unity and common calling is fortified, confidence that a better world can be created is strengthened, and a commitment to action becomes manifest. Such distinctive conversations gradually attract ever-larger numbers to take part in a range of community activities. Themes of faith and certitude surface naturally, prompted by the receptivity and experiences of those involved. What is clear, then, is that as the institute process in a cluster gains momentum, the act of teaching comes to assume greater prominence in the lives of the friends

29 December 2015, Message of the Universal House of Justice

<p>ATC GATHERING 12 - 14 November</p>	<p>INSTITUTE SEMINAR 19 - 21 November</p>
<p>DAY OF THE COVENANT 25 November</p>	<p>CENTENARY COMMEMORATION OF THE ASCENSION OF ABDU'L-BAHA 21 - 28 November</p>
<p>ASCENSION OF ABDU'L-BAHA 27 November</p>	
<p>DECEMBER 2021</p>	
<p>SUMMER TRAINING 3 - 7 December</p>	
<p>JANUARY 2022</p>	
<p>EXPANSION PHASE 4 - 23 January</p>	<p>SUMMER SCHOOLS 30 December - 2 January</p>
	<p>CONFERENCE OF THE CONTINENTAL BOARDS OF COUNSELLORS AND AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS 3 - 5 January</p>
<p>NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL MEETING 29 - 30 January</p>	
<p>ISGP SEMINAR 23 January - 3 February</p>	<p>FEBRUARY 2022</p>
	<p>REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL MEETING TBD</p>
	<p>INSTITUTE SEMINAR TBD</p>
<p>LAUNCH OF THE NINE YEAR PLAN CONFERENCES Leading up to Ridvan 2022</p>	

Description of the systems and processes of the cluster

