Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Birthday of Bahá’u’lláh across Northern Ireland

During the recent Bicentennial celebrations all across the province, it was wonderful to see the Northern Ireland region respond to the occasion by drawing on the diversity of talents within our community in various ways. The many friends from the wider community who also participated and collaborated in the recent celebrations points to a significant level of receptivity to Bahá’u’lláh’s message across Northern Ireland.

The Council would like to express its sincere gratitude for the mighty effort made by one and all. Thanks for giving your energy and time to make the Bicentennial very special! This edition of communiqué is an attempt to capture some of the highlights of what was happening across the region during the this very special period.

Enjoy the read!

From the Universal House of Justice

Connected to the transformative power of the Revelation, every soul can draw closer to Bahá’u’lláh, grow in capacity, find joy in service, and learn to assist others. The results of the magnificent effort you have made offer tremendous promise—but fulfilling that promise will require fortitude. Let the forces released in this period lend impetus to your personal and collective endeavours during the remainder of this bicentennial year and, indeed, through all eight cycles leading up to the two hundredth anniversary of the Birth of the Báb. With our expectations heightened and our hearts implored divine favours on your behalf, we give praise to the Ancient Beauty, a fresh glimpse of Whose soul-entrancing glory He has in these days chosen to disclose.

31 October 2017
Ballymena

On Thursday 19 November at the Braid Centre, Ballymena Bahá’ís and friends celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Bahá’u’lláh. It was a pleasure to welcome Deputy Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Cheryl Johnston to the celebration.

The speaker, Hazel Holmlund, shared the news that Her Majesty the Queen has graciously agreed to accept a specially crafted gift to honour the 200th Anniversary celebrations. The gift is a work of calligraphic art illustrating the prayer that Bahá’u’lláh revealed for Queen Victoria. She went on to read the message that Prime Minister Theresa May sent to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United Kingdom.

Guests from the Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and the Bahá’í Faith read quotations from each of their religions which showed the shared belief in love, unity and peace.

At the end of the event it was agreed to explore the idea of setting up an Inter Faith Forum in Mid and East Antrim which would be under the umbrella of the Northern Ireland Inter faith Forum. The NIIFF, in common with other Inter faith movements around the world, exists in order to encourage understanding and mutual respect between persons and groups from different religion and belief backgrounds.

Belfast

The Bicentenary celebrations in Belfast took place over three days. The Saturday night was marked by a magnificent formal presentation in the Ulster Museum on Bahá’u’lláh’s life and mission; a mix of story, music, audio-visual presentations and a fine choir performance captured the imagination of those present, many sharing that they were deeply moved by the occasion. The Friday and Sunday celebrations drew on many friends currently involved in the community-building activities across Belfast. One strength of these gatherings was the participation of children and youth, and the sense of ownership gained by many friends of the Faith who assisted with arranging and participating in the occasion.

In an effort for the weekend to be one which was characterized by worship and service, many individuals, family and groups offered service in the name of Bahá’u’lláh. This included a prayer chain from 7 am–7 pm on Saturday which included all those who wanted to say prayers for peace. Many families and individuals, especially in Windsor, either opened their homes for people to join them for prayers, or had family prayers together in remembrance of Bahá’u’lláh. Some junior youth got together to bake buns to give them to neighbours, some youth were planning future service projects that as youth they could offer to their neighbourhood, others were offering service in whatever way they could.

Craigavon

We celebrated the Bicentenary in Lurgan Town Hall on Saturday from 2.00pm–4.00pm. The programme included prayers and writings put to music and sung, the video The Diving Physician exhibition including quotes and examples of community building activities as well as a map created by JY groups of Bahá’u’lláh’s
Stories of invitations to the occasion

The opening prayer at the event in Derry was read by a newly made friend who came into contact with the Faith whilst in Zambia visiting her sister; she noticed the Baha’i centre on her way to a church service. Curious, she went in and attended some events and heard about the upcoming Bicentenary.

A Baha’i who became her friend there put her in contact with some local Baha’is in Northern Ireland, where she lives. Coincidentally, she lives a 5 minute walk from some Baha’is in Derry!

As the artistic element to Book 1 they made a visual representation for the Bicentenary celebration of the quote ‘ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch’. They wrote quotes on the 200 leaves to help memorize quotations. Some new friends were introduced to the name of Baha’u’llah through the artistic project when assisting them make this vision come to fruition.

exiles. Good conversations stimulated by video and exhibition and refreshments. There was a message from ABC council Lord Mayor and a contribution from the local YMCA to our postcard wall project: Craigavon in 200 years.

There were 49 in attendance (Baha’is 15 adults and 6 JY/children; Guests 17 adults and 11 JY/children). The guests included a descendant of Joan Waring the first recorded Baha’i in Ireland and her wife. He is happy that Joan Warring is acknowledged as a Baha’i and he invited a reader/reading from the Faith for the local Carol Service. Also present were the RE teacher and SENCO from the Integrated Second-

The Celebration was opened by Mr. Mark Glasgow the Deputy Chair of the Mid Ulster Council (this spans three council districts) who was Piped into the hall by a Scottish bag piper Colin McClean.

The foremost Choral Leader in Northern Ireland, Una McCann conducted the Antrim Community Choir and Dr. Les Gornall gave a presentation explaining the day, describing Baha’u’llah’s life, showing extracts of ‘Light for the World’ and highlights of the activities of the Magherafelt and district Baha’is over the past 30 years.

Mr. Mervyn Hawe, the chief Surgeon of the Mid Ulster hospital (retired) sent greetings to the Baha’is from the Christian community and read George Townshend’s Reflections of a Father while Hazel Holmlund read George Townshend’s prayer for Ireland.

The inclusiveness of the celebration continued with Mary Cecil’s Poetry from Rathlin Island and a wonderful rendition of ‘From a Distance’ by Alison Norgate, and Robert Best who also got the room rocking with a solo piece. The evening finished in a feast of jigs and reels from the Bellaghy (Traditional Irish )Music Group. Refreshments were served to a delighted audience.

The Magherafelt Community is currently working with local schools as part of the celebrations and activities that will last many months.

Our door to door and postal activities has lead to a doubling of the numbers directly engaged in the core activities in the town.

Thanks to Arjang Agahi’s photography, a short movie of the event can be viewed at: https://tinyurl.com/BiCent25Mins
North Down and Ards

North Down and Ards joined together in celebration for the bicentenary of the birth of Bahá’u’lláh. The dignified programme consisted of an introduction followed by the story of Bahá’u’lláh’s life interspersed with prayers and live music. It emphasised the significance of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation and brought greater clarity to those attending of the Message He brought to the world.

The deputy mayor, councillor Gavin Walker, commented on the peaceful and transformative teachings of Bahá’u’lláh whilst also recognising that the persecution suffered by Bahá’u’lláh was similar to all those Manifestations of God who came before Him. Having previously visited the Bahá’í House of Worship in Chicago, councillor Walker said that although Bangor does not presently have a Bahá’í temple, it surely will have one in the future. MP Jim Shannon also shared words of encouragement for the Bahá’í community worldwide, assuring us of his continued support in parliament, particularly for our dear friends in Iran.

Roughly 60 people attended the event, about 40 of whom were community of interest. It was an uplifting and inspiring event, with conversations of spiritual import during the social part at the end. North Down and Ards community will endeavour to continue these conversations in the coming weeks.

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Park Ward

The bicentenary of the birth of Bahá’u’lláh was celebrated by the Park community in the Claudy Pastoral Centre (St Patrick’s Old Church) on Saturday October 21st. Tradition has it that this spot was originally one of the seven churches which St Patrick established along the length of the river Faughan. The present building was erected in 1817 on the ancient site and it was abandoned in 1980 then becoming derelict. It was recently refurbished to a high level with lottery and grant funding becoming established as Claudy Pastoral Centre in 2015.

The meeting celebrating 200 years since the birth of the founder of the Bahá’í Faith was attended by 23 Bahá’ís and friends. After a brief welcome the letter from the Universal House of Justice was read followed by music and readings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh.

Catering was provided by a friend in copious amounts allowing us to send surplus food to share with the friends at both the Letterkenny and the Derry celebrations in the evening. Visitors had the opportunity to browse the exhibition and ask questions. The beautiful floral displays also provided by one of the friends helped create a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere. The exhibition included photographs of Bahá’í Houses of Worship around the world, some of the buildings at the World Centre and quotations from the Writings.

Each visitor was presented, as they departed, with a copy of the new “Bahá’í” magazine, the small booklet about Bahá’u’lláh, a laminated Hidden Word and a red rose.

Two homes hosted lunch on Sunday with close friends. Guests were invited to follow-on programmes over the next three Fridays, with three homes in the community hosting meetings for enquirers.

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Are you lonely where you are,
When the shadows steal the night
Do your thoughts drift in longings,
To oceans of light

Do you see the bright shores,
And want to be there
To sail in the wind,
To a great new somewhere

To hear the seas sing,
In time with the flow
As the velvet night falls,
Over someone you know

Will anticipation be yours,
As you drift in the tide
To reach those shores that await,
And anchor beside

And fade to your past,
Your spirit is free
To live where you loved,
In the wide beating sea

Mary Cecil