



The Bahá'í Faith in the United States

BAHÁ'Í PRAYER FOR AMERICA

Let this American democracy become glorious in spiritual degrees even as it has aspired to material degrees, and render this just government victorious.

Confirm this revered nation to upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity, to promulgate the Most Great Peace, to become thereby most glorious and praise-worthy among all the nations of the world. —Bahá'í Writings



BAHÁ'Í FAITH

In the New York City Bahá'í Center, housed in a refurbished theater in lower Manhattan, Bahá'ís host live jazz concerts every Tuesday evening in the center's John Birks Gillespie Auditorium, dedicated to the late jazz great—and Bahá'í—Dizzy Gillespie.

At the Native American Bahá'í Institute, located on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Northern Arizona, Native American Bahá'ís have built a circular prayer hall that is the focal point for educational and social services that benefit the entire region.

In rural South Carolina, African American men come together for the Black Men's Gathering at the Louis Gregory Bahá'í Institute, a retreat inspired by the life of Louis Gregory, a contemporary and colleague of W.E.B. DuBois, who embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1909 and devoted the remainder of his life to championing race unity.

At Green Acre, a Bahá'í spiritual retreat center in Maine, Bahá'í actors reenact episodes from the life of Sarah Farmer, a pioneer in the interfaith movement who played an important role in the American spiritual renaissance of the early 20th century.

These are snapshots of the Bahá'í community in the contiguous United States, a community that has grown steadily since the Bahá'í Faith arrived in America in the late 1890's. Today about 170,000 Bahá'ís live across the country, including on over 100 Indian reservations.

The U.S. Bahá'í population reflects the racial and cultural diversity of the American people and includes about 10,000 Iranian Bahá'í refugees who fled Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The largest Bahá'í populations are in California, Georgia, Illinois, South Carolina and Texas.

A VISION OF AMERICA'S SPIRITUAL DESTINY

The American nation, Bahá'ís believe, will evolve through tests and trials to become a land of spiritual distinction and leadership, a champion of justice and unity among all peoples and nations, and a powerful servant of the cause of everlasting peace, the peace promised by God in the sacred texts of the world's religions. To achieve this destiny, however, our nation must overcome several persistent spiritual challenges—removing every trace of racism from our hearts, embracing the equality of women in every department of life, eliminating the inordinate disparity between rich and poor, transforming a limited nationalism to the love of humanity as a whole, and in humility before God, submerge religious prejudices in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable us to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace. These are among the preeminent goals of the U.S. Bahá'í community.

THE U.S. BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

The Bahá'í Faith was first mentioned in the United States in 1893 at the World's



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BAHÁ'Í TEACHINGS FOR A WORLD CIVILIZATION

- Abandonment of all forms of prejudice
- Equality between the sexes
- Recognition of the common source and essential oneness of the world's great religions
- Elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth
 - Religion must be the cause of unity
- Universal compulsory education
- Responsibility of each person to search independently for truth
- Establishment of a world federal system, based on the principles of international collective security
- Recognition that religion is in harmony with reason and scientific knowledge

Parliament of Religions at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The following year a Chicago businessman, Thornton Chase, became the first American Bahá'í. In 1909, 39 delegates from 36 cities attended the first national convention in Chicago. In 1944, the centennial year of the Bahá'í Faith, every state had at least one local Bahá'í administrative body. By 1963, Bahá'ís resided in more than 1,700 localities and by 1968 in more than 3,300. Today Bahá'ís reside in about 10,000 towns and cities around the country.

The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy, and its affairs are administered by a network of elected lay councils at the international, national and local levels. The elected governing body of the U.S. Bahá'í community is the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, a nine-member council with headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, near the Bahá'í House of Worship in neighboring Wilmette. There are approximately 1,100 elected local spiritual assemblies in the United States.

Bahá'í elections are held in a prayerful atmosphere by secret ballot and plurality vote. Nominations, candidacies and electioneering are not permitted in the Bahá'í electoral process.

The National Spiritual Assembly oversees the administrative affairs of the Bahá'ís of the United States and provides guidance for their spiritual and moral development. The Assembly oversees a publishing trust and several periodicals, including *The American Bahá'í* newspaper; *Brilliant Star*, a magazine for children; and *World Order*, a quarterly journal of opinion and ideas. The assembly also operates retreat and conference centers in California, Michigan and Maine.

INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY AND LOCAL COMMUNITY LIFE

Local spiritual assemblies offer spiritual guidance to the members of their communities and plan devotional services, study classes for children and adults, social events, service projects and the observance of holy days. Most of these activities are open to the public. All Bahá'í activities are funded by voluntary contributions from members of the faith. No subsidies or donations are accepted from other sources. Bahá'u'lláh's writings emphasize the family as the foundation of society, and equality between husband and wife. Divorce is discouraged, but not prohibited. The Bahá'í teachings stress the importance of daily prayer and meditation and prohibit the use of alcoholic drinks or illegal drugs. Bahá'ís fast from dawn to dusk for a 19-day period of spiritual reflection each year.

THE BAHÁ'Í HOUSE OF WORSHIP

The Bahá'í House of Worship for the North American Continent is located in Wilmette, Illinois, on the shores of Lake Michigan. Built over a period of 40 years, the temple was dedicated for public worship in 1953 as the first of eight continental Bahá'í Houses of Worship. The other seven Houses of Worship are in Panama, Germany, Uganda, Australia, Western Samoa, India and Chile (currently under construction). The nine-sided domed temple, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, reflects the Bahá'í belief in the unity of religions. The House of Worship is a place for personal prayer and meditation and is open to the public. Daily devotional services consist of the recitation of scriptures from the Bahá'í Faith and the other divinely revealed religions.