



A VISION OF UNITY

*Centenary of the Bahá'í
Faith in Australia
1920 - 2020*



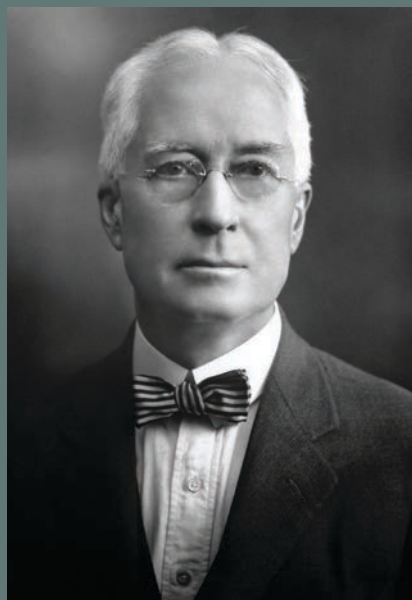
The Australian Bahá'í Community is celebrating its centenary. Since the first Bahá'ís arrived in Australia in 1920, our community has embraced people from all backgrounds and walks of life in cities, towns and rural areas across the country.

Bahá'ís are inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, to build unity between all the people of the world, believing that all human beings are created noble and equal, and are guided by one God who has revealed His religion to humanity over time through successive divine messengers known as Manifestations of God.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this brochure contains the names and images of people who have passed away.

THE ORIGINS OF THE AUSTRALIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY



The Australian Bahá'í community was established by John Henry Hyde Dunn (1855-1941) and Clara Dunn (1869-1960), who arrived in Sydney on the steamship S.S. Sonoma from the United States on 10 April 1920.

Hyde Dunn was an Englishman who had emigrated to the United States. Clara Dunn was born in London to Irish parents and raised in Canada. They married in 1917, late in life, after their first partners had passed away.

Both Hyde and Clara Dunn had embraced the Bahá'í Faith in the United States in the early years of the twentieth century. They both met 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then head of the Bahá'í Faith, in San Francisco during His historic visit to the United States and Canada in 1912. He made an impact on them that lasted for the rest of their lives.

ARRIVAL IN AUSTRALIA

The Dunns were inspired by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to travel across the world to establish the Bahá’í community in Australia. He supported their decision to move to this country, writing to them following their arrival:

“ This journey is pregnant with greater prosperity, because great results will issue therefrom. At present it is full of hardship, but later on favour, comfort and happiness will be bestowed.”

At the time of their arrival, Hyde was aged 65 and Clara 51. They had little financial means, and knew no one in Australia. The qualities of courage, faith, persistence and audacity sustained them.

Establishing a livelihood in a new country and at such an age was no easy task. Initially Clara took secretarial work until Hyde Dunn found employment as a travelling



salesman for the Bacchus Marsh Milk Company, soon acquired by Nestle. His work took him across the country, travelling mainly by train, and by 1923 he had visited 225 towns. He worked for Nestle for nearly 12 years, travelling to every state and major city and town in Australia.

An engaging speaker who never lost his English accent, he spoke about the Bahá’í teachings wherever he went: in churches, at events organised by social and philosophical movements, and in private homes. He had a friendly disposition and a distinguished, upright appearance.

He was described by Shoghi Effendi, who had been appointed the Guardian and head of the Bahá’í Faith following the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921, as “great-hearted and heroic”.

CLARA DUNN

Clara Dunn often accompanied her husband in his travels, hosting guests and giving public talks herself. She also engaged in charity work.

Clara Dunn combined a charitable nature with a gentle but determined manner. She had a great sense of compassion and often used her nursing skills to care for others. Friends described her as warm, humble but self-assured, graceful, serene, and fun-loving.

In 1932 she travelled to the Holy Land on pilgrimage, where she met Shoghi Effendi, with whom she and her husband had corresponded regularly for a decade. On her return, Shoghi Effendi wrote: "The services which both of you have



rendered, and are still rendering, to the Faith, are engraved upon the tablet of my heart. Nothing can efface their trace or dim their memory."

Following the passing of Hyde Dunn in 1941, Clara continued to serve the growing Bahá'í community with great vigour, travelling frequently to visit and encourage Bahá'ís across the country.

Both Clara and Hyde Dunn were designated Hands of the Cause, the highest honour that could be given to an individual Bahá'í, in 1952.

Clara Dunn made her final visit to the Holy Land in 1957, in her late eighties, to attend the gathering of the Hands of the Cause following the passing of Shoghi Effendi. The following year, she played a key role in the foundation ceremony of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney, the city where she and her husband had once lived as the only two Bahá'ís on the continent.

She passed away in 1960 at the age of 91. She was buried alongside her husband at Woronora Memorial Park in Sutherland, Sydney.

To the community they founded, they will always be remembered as "Mother and Father Dunn".

EARLY AUSTRALIAN BAHÁ'ÍS

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh conveyed by Hyde and Clara Dunn found a ready audience among those searching for spiritual alternatives in the wake of the horrors of the Great War. Many early Australian Bahá'ís heard about the Bahá'í Faith at gatherings of the New Thought movement, the Theosophical Society, and at similar settings.

FIRST AUSTRALIAN BAHÁ'Í

The first Australian to join the Bahá'í Faith was Oswald Whitaker, an optometrist, who met Hyde Dunn during a business trip to Lismore. Given some Bahá'í sacred writings to read, he responded, "every line is an evidence of truth".

Oswald Whitaker's home in Sydney hosted many Bahá'í gatherings and visitors. He served as a member of the Bahá'í national governing body, including as Vice Chairperson, from 1934 up to his passing in 1942.



Oswald Whitaker

One of his fellow members wrote: "He had a rare gift of friendship, constant and deep, which communicated itself, even to strangers, as a benediction of goodwill. He never spared himself when duty called or the opportunity of extending a helping hand presented itself."

EFFIE BAKER

The second person, and the first Australian woman to become a Bahá'í, was Euphemia (Effie) Baker from Goldsborough, Victoria.

She met Clara and Hyde Dunn and became a Bahá'í in Melbourne in 1922. Fellow Victorian Ruby Beaver became a Bahá'í soon after.

A pioneering female photographer, Effie Baker travelled to the Holy Land on pilgrimage in 1925, together with the first Bahá'í pilgrims from New Zealand.



Sydney Bahá'ís including Oswald Whitaker (standing, far left) with visiting American Bahá'í speaker Keith Ransom-Kehler (front centre), 1931

Invited by Shoghi Effendi to extend her visit, she remained in Haifa for 11 years, assisting with photographic work and serving as hostess of the Western Pilgrim House and the first keeper of the Bahá'í International Archives.

In 1930-31 she travelled for eight months in Persia to make a photographic record of sites and relics associated with the origins of the Bahá'í Faith.

She often had to take photographs veiled in a cloak, and develop them overnight in a makeshift darkroom, before moving on to the next destination.

Her photographs were published shortly thereafter to illustrate *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*.

Effie Baker returned to Australia in 1936, and later moved to a small flat at the Bahá'í national headquarters at Paddington, Sydney, once again acting as hostess and taking care of archives. She passed away in 1968 and is buried in Mona Vale Cemetery.



Effie Baker

SOME OTHER EARLY AUSTRALIAN BAHÁ'ÍS



PERCY AND MAYSIE ALMOND

The first South Australian Bahá'ís were Percy and Maysie Almond, who heard Hyde Dunn speaking in Adelaide in 1923. After hearing his talk, Percy turned to his wife and said: "This is it."

They had found teachings that answered their questions, and embarked upon a lifetime of service to Australian society through the Bahá'í community that continued into the 1960s.

Percy and Maysie helped establish the first local Bahá'í governing body in Adelaide in December 1924.

They contributed to the growth of the Bahá'í community in many localities including Melbourne, Bowral, Murray Bridge and Burnside.

Percy Almond was elected as a member of the first Bahá'í national governing body, on which he served from 1934 to 1937.



GRETTA LAMPRILL

Tasmanian nurse Greta Lamprill became a Bahá'í early in 1924, after hearing a talk by Hyde Dunn in Hobart. She later recalled: "Then and there, with the whole of my inner and outer being, I dedicated my life to Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith."

For many years the only Tasmanian Bahá'í, she helped establish the first local Bahá'í governing body in Hobart in 1949 and served as its inaugural secretary.

From 1942 Greta served as a member of the national Bahá'í governing body. In 1953, she was among five of its members who left Australia to help establish Bahá'í communities in the Pacific.

She and Gladys Parke took the Bahá'í Faith to the Society Islands (now French Polynesia), returning to Tasmania permanently only after a Bahá'í local governing body was established in Tahiti.



Collis Featherstone with his family, 1954



Clara Dunn (seated on chair second from right) with Bahá'ís at Yerrinbool Bahá'í School, 1950s

COLLIS FEATHERSTONE

Another outstanding early Australian Bahá'í was H. Collis Featherstone, an Adelaide engineer who joined the Bahá'í Faith in 1944.

Elected to the Bahá'í national governing body in 1949, he served the Bahá'í community in Australia and overseas with great physical and spiritual energy.

He and his wife, Madge, met Shoghi Effendi during their pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1953.

In 1957 he became the only Australian-born Bahá'í to be designated a Hand of the Cause. In this capacity he travelled to all continents to visit and encourage Bahá'í communities across the span of more than four decades. He passed away in Nepal in 1990.



Hyde and Clara Dunn (seated on chairs) with Mariette and Stanley W. Bolton and family, who became Bahá'ís in Sydney in 1931

BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTIONS

The affairs of the Bahá'í Community are governed by community members through elected bodies known as Spiritual Assemblies. There is no clergy. A nine-member Local Spiritual Assembly can be formed in any locality where nine or more adult Bahá'ís reside, with its membership elected annually by the community.

The first Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly in Australia was formed in Melbourne in December 1923, followed by Perth in July 1924 and Adelaide in December 1924. The Spiritual Assembly of Sydney was formed in 1925. The first Spiritual Assemblies in Hobart and Brisbane were formed in 1949, after the Second World War.

The early Bahá'í Assemblies or groups held public meetings, printed newsletters, presented the Bahá'í message to public officials, and consulted on the administrative affairs of a growing community.



NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

In 1934, the Bahá'í community held its first national convention where it formed its first national governing body, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand. Formed in the same year as the National Assembly of Persia, it was among the first eight Bahá'í National Assemblies in the world.



Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Australia and New Zealand, 1934

The convention took place at the Bahá'í Room at 114 Hunter Street, Sydney. There were three delegates each from Adelaide, Sydney and Auckland. The members elected to the first National Assembly were Percy Almond, Ethel Blundell, Hilda Brooks, Robert Brown, Hyde Dunn, Silver Jackman, Charlotte Moffitt,



Bahá'ís gathered at National Convention outside the national headquarters at 2 Lang Road, Paddington, 1954

Margaret Stevenson and Oswald Whitaker. Adelaide-based Hilda Brooks served as the National Secretary for the first ten years.

Due to distance and the cost and difficulty of travel, the members met in person only once a year, consulting between meetings by correspondence. This made the Secretary's role an arduous one.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

In 1944 the National Assembly acquired its first national headquarters at 2 Lang Road, Paddington. In the 1940s and 1950s, the position of National Secretary was occupied by Dulcie Dive, Mariette Bolton, James Heggie and Noel Walker, each bringing different energy and talents to the role.

A separate National Assembly for New Zealand was formed in 1957.

The establishment of legal recognition for a non-Christian religion was a challenge that had to be overcome.

Legal incorporation of Bahá'í institutions began with the Local Assembly of Adelaide in 1934, and had extended to 19 Local Assemblies by 1963. The acquisition of legal recognition and protection allowed Assemblies to hold title to property, and facilitated recognition of Bahá'í marriage ceremonies, burial procedures, and holy days.

In 2020 there are 172 Local Spiritual Assemblies, with Bahá'ís residing in 350 local government areas throughout the country.

EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

The Bahá'í teachings uphold the equality of women and men.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote, *"women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God."*

His son and successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, emphasised equality between men and women as a fundamental principle of the Bahá'í Faith.

He supported women's suffrage, and highlighted the importance of the education of girls, noting that where a family could not afford to fully educate all of its children, priority should be given to the daughters .

LEADING ROLE OF WOMEN

Women played a leading role in the Australian Bahá'í community from its beginnings. In the early years more women than men joined the Bahá'í Faith in Australia.

Outstanding early Australian Bahá'í women included Hilda Brooks, Silver Jackman, Ethel Dawe, Leila Clark, Bertha Dobbins and Rose Hawthorne in Adelaide; Effie Baker, Margaret Dixson and Eleanor Wheeler in Melbourne; Jane Routh, Charlotte Moffitt, Margaret Rowling and Mariette Bolton in Sydney; and Gretta Lamprill and Gladys Parke in Hobart.

The leadership of women was reflected in the membership of the Bahá'í institutions.

Women formed the majority of members of the national governing body for the first fifteen years from its establishment in 1934, making the Bahá'í community a rarity among Australian religious communities at the time, and even today. Over time, the numbers of male and female Bahá'ís became more balanced. Since its formation in 1934, a total of 46 women and 56 men have served as members of the National Assembly.

The Australian Bahá'í Community has continued to be a strong advocate for the advancement of women in Australian society, including as an active member of national women's alliances and networks.



Hilda Brooks, the first Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly



*Travelling American Bahá'í journalist, Martha Root, with Bahá'ís in Melbourne c. 1924.
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PROFILE OF AN AUSTRALIAN BAHÁ'Í WOMAN

As a young woman, Thelma Perks travelled extensively in Europe and North America. She first came upon the Bahá'í Faith while on a ship sailing to London, and later met notable early American Bahá'ís in New York. After joining the Australian Bahá'í community in 1947, she became a travel companion and devoted assistant to Clara Dunn, criss-crossing Australia to visit Bahá'ís in every state.

Elected as a member of the National Assembly in 1954, she was appointed in the same year, together with Collis Featherstone, as one of the first two members of the Auxiliary Board, whose role was to advise and assist local communities. She continued to serve concurrently as a member of the National Assembly until 1963, while also shouldering many administrative responsibilities.

When the institution of the Continental Board of Counsellors was formed in 1968, Thelma Perks was one of three

people appointed to serve as inaugural Counsellor for Australasia, alongside Howard Harwood and Suhayl Ala'í. In this capacity she continued to travel and speak extensively in Australia, Asia and the Pacific until 1980. She is remembered as a dignified, cheerful and gracious soul who led by example.

Upon her passing in 1988, the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote that her "outstanding services for the promotion of the Faith in Australasia will long be remembered".



Thelma Perks (right) with Collis Featherstone and Clara Dunn

ILLUSTRATED TIMELINE

1920s



10 APRIL 1920: John Henry Hyde Dunn and Clara Dunn arrive in Australia

1922: The first Australian, Oswald Whitaker, becomes a Bahá'í, followed by Euphemia (Effie) Baker and Ruby Beaver

1923: The first Local Spiritual Assembly is formed in Melbourne

1924: Local Spiritual Assemblies formed in Perth and Adelaide

1925: The first Bahá'í pilgrims travel from Australia and New Zealand to the Holy Land

1930s - 1950s

1934: The first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand is formed

1938: First national Bahá'í summer school is held at Yerrinbool

1944: The first national headquarters is acquired at 2 Lang Road, Paddington



1950s: Australian Bahá'ís assist the development of Bahá'í communities throughout the Pacific

1957: New Zealand forms a separate National Spiritual Assembly

1960s - 1980s

1961: The Bahá'í House of Worship for Australasia is opened in Ingleside, NSW

1960s-1970s: Influx of new young Bahá'ís attracted to the Faith's teachings



1980s: Bahá'í Special Religious Education classes begin in public schools in New South Wales, followed by other states

1982: Bahá'ís fleeing persecution in Iran start arriving in Australia under the special humanitarian program, adding to the diversity and capacity of the community

1986: Peace Expo held in the grounds of the Bahá'í House of Worship. Australian Bahá'í community receives Peace Messenger award

1990s - 2020

1990s: The training institute begins developing individual capacity for service, setting in motion a new process of community building

1999: Bahá'í Centre in the national capital is officially opened by Governor-General Sir William Deane. Other Bahá'í Centres follow



2009: More than 5000 people attend the Australian Bahá'í community's biggest-ever gathering at Darling Harbour Convention Centre, Sydney

2017- 2019: Bicentenaries of the Births of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb celebrated in the Federal Parliament

2020: Centenary of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia

A COMMUNITY OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The oneness of humanity is a core teaching of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Bahá'í scriptures say:

"Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other ... Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land."

The Australian Bahá'í community has sought over the past century to live up to the Bahá'í ideal of unity in diversity. Today the community comprises members from all parts of the globe, including European, Asian, African, North and South American, and Pacific Island nations.



Bahá'ís and friends in Warrnambool, Victoria, 1970s

OVERCOMING PREJUDICE

The Bahá'í teachings on equality and the oneness of humanity have inspired Australian Bahá'ís to overcome the racial and religious prejudices of their time. In response to a question about the White Australia policy from an Australian Bahá'í, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1925 observed: "It is clear that this policy of rigid exclusion ... finds no justification in the Bahá'í Teachings." It went on to emphasise the importance of the elimination of all racial and national prejudices and of universal education for all people.

While most early Australian Bahá'ís were of Christian heritage, some came from Jewish backgrounds.

The Australian Bahá'í community grew more diverse as a result of the post-war migration program and the lifting of the White Australia policy.

The first Muslims to become Bahá'ís in Australia were Frank and Bibi Khan, originally from the Punjab, in 1948. Frank Khan later served as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, as did their son, Peter, and daughter, Joy. Dr Peter Khan served as a member of the Universal House of Justice, the international Bahá'í governing body, from 1987 to 2010.



Uncle Fred Murray with Collis Featherstone

INDIGENOUS BAHÁ'ÍS

The first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bahá'ís joined the Bahá'í community in the 1950s, especially in South Australia and the Northern Territory. In 1963, Uncle Fred Murray of the Mirning people of Western Australia was a speaker at the first World Congress of the Bahá'í Faith, held at the Royal Albert Hall in London. He and fellow Bahá'í Howard Harwood collaborated to produce a pamphlet telling Uncle Fred's life story in his own words, hoping this would increase understanding and contribute towards reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

In 1967 Queenslander Elizabeth Hindson, then known as Betty Anderson, became the first Aboriginal person elected to serve as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia. She too had attended the World Congress in London four years earlier.

BAHÁ'ÍS FROM IRAN

Following the widespread persecution of Bahá'ís after the 1979 revolution in Iran, several thousand Iranian Bahá'ís entered Australia under a special humanitarian assistance program established in 1982. The Australian Bahá'í community worked together with the Federal government to assist their settlement in cities and regional areas throughout Australia.

The influx of Bahá'ís from Iran, the birthplace of the Bahá'í Faith, added greatly to the richness and capacity of the Australian community. Their settlement, integration and contribution to Australian life has been a success story of the Australian immigration program.

The Australian Senate adopted a resolution condemning the persecution of the Bahá'ís in 1981, the first in a long series of parliamentary resolutions on that topic that continue until today. Various Australian Foreign Ministers, State Parliaments, and individual MPs have continued to call for an end to the persecution.



Participants during a peace camp, Penguin Island, 1985

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Fostering spiritual life and personal transformation has been a key concern of the Australian Bahá'í community from its earliest years. Early Bahá'ís came together in devotional gatherings in one another's homes and small venues, drawing on the prayers revealed in the Bahá'í sacred writings. They also celebrated the nine Bahá'í holy days which occur every year.

A site was purchased for a future Bahá'í House of Worship at Ingleside, overlooking the northern beaches of Sydney, in the early 1950s. Construction was brought forward at the request of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, when plans to build a House of Worship in Tehran were impeded by a revival of persecution. This was a formidable challenge for an Australian Bahá'í community whose membership numbered no more than 500, widely spread across the country. The House of Worship opened in 1961.

As the community grew, permanent Bahá'í Centres opened in Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart and some regional centres, providing new settings in which public gatherings, educational programs and service activities could be held.

In recent years, successive Australian Prime Ministers and Leaders of the Opposition have addressed messages to the Australian Bahá'í community for the occasion of the Festival of Ridván, the holiest Bahá'í festival of the year.

BAHÁ'Í HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Construction of the House of Worship began in 1957. John Brogan was appointed as the architect, based on a supplied design. Built before the Sydney Opera House, the House of Worship was a challenge to construct because builders were used to rectangular structures, not a nine-sided building with a 34 metre dome. There being no cranes tall enough in Sydney at the time, a helicopter was used to put the crown of the dome in place, attracting widespread media attention.

The House of Worship was dedicated in 1961 by Ruhíyyih Khanum, the widow of Shoghi Effendi.

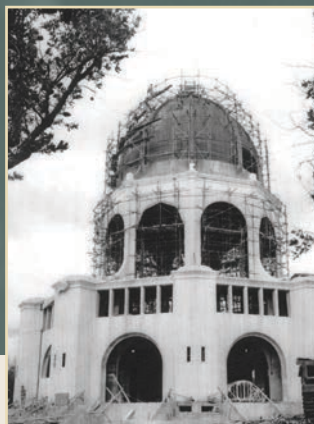
The Lord Mayor of Sydney held a reception for international dignitaries present for the dedication, and press coverage was considerable.



Governor-General of Australia Sir Ninian Stephen and Lady Stephen attend a service at the House of Worship in 1986

“An edifice or temple is to be built in order that humanity might find a place of meeting, and this is to be conducive to unity and fellowship among them.”

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



On 18 September 1961 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that 100 visitors from 20 countries were among the 1800 people attending the opening.

During its early years, in a society where sectarian divisions remained deep, the House of Worship was a symbol of unity that brought together Australians from different denominations and faiths, foreshadowing the modern interfaith movement, in which Australian Bahá'ís remain closely involved.

In the 1970s, the national headquarters for the Australian Bahá'í community was moved from Paddington to its present location in the grounds of the House of Worship.

The “Peace Expo” held in the House of Worship grounds for the International Year of Peace in 1986 attracted

10,000 visitors. The Australian Bahá'í Community was the recipient of one of just two Peace Messenger awards presented by the United Nations for Year of Peace activities in Australia.

The House of Worship is dedicated to prayer and spiritual reflection. The human voice is the only instrument used inside, and services are limited to reading or singing from the sacred texts from the Bahá'í Faith and other world religions. There are no lectures or sermons.

The House of Worship, with its beautiful bush-clad grounds, has hosted hundreds of thousands of visitors. Many gatherings, festivals, celebrations and service activities have been held in its grounds, reflecting the nexus between worship and service to the community.

BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION

Early Australian Bahá'ís were keen to find ways to learn more and deepen understanding about their faith.

The desire to explore and articulate Bahá'í viewpoints prompted New Zealand Bahá'í Bertram Dewing to establish the magazine *Herald of the South* in 1925.

It was one of only a few Bahá'í magazines being produced in the world at the time, the others appearing in India, Germany and the United States. Publication moved to Australia in 1930.

Bahá'í Quarterly, the national news journal, was founded in 1936. It currently appears under the title *The Australian Bahá'í*.

Bahá'í Publications Australia, the national publishing trust, has published Bahá'í scripture as well as academic, popular and children's literature since its establishment in 1975.

From the 1980s, the Association for Bahá'í Studies-Australia began hosting seminars and conferences to promote study of the Bahá'í Faith and to correlate aspects of its teachings with contemporary thought and issues.

Since 2010, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity has conducted residential seminars to build capacity in university students and



young professionals to contribute to prevalent discourses concerned with the betterment of society, drawing on both science and religion as two complementary systems of knowledge and practice.

YERRINBOOL BAHÁ'Í SCHOOL

A cornerstone of Bahá'í education in Australia has been the Yerrinbool Bahá'í school in the NSW southern highlands, established on a property donated by early Sydney Bahá'ís Stanley W. and Mariette Bolton.

It has hosted national Bahá'í summer schools since 1938, attracting international speakers.

The property and its facilities have been expanded and improved over the decades, and the programs have broadened in scope.



Current offerings include camps for children and youth, seminars for university students and professionals, and a range of other short programs conducted in a retreat-style setting.

In 2019 a similar facility was acquired at Mount Morton in the Dandenong Ranges on the outskirts of Melbourne.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Bahá'í children's education began in small home-based settings from the 1930s, often by mothers who used the limited resources available or created new ones which they shared with others.

By the early 1950s a national children's education committee was established to support children's class teachers.

Such classes continue to be run in neighbourhoods throughout Australia today, following a standard curriculum.

From the 1980s, Bahá'í Special Religious Education or Instruction classes have been conducted in public schools in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

Thousands of Australian children have participated in these classes, which are open to children from all backgrounds, during their school years.



COMMUNITY BUILDING TODAY

One hundred years after the arrival of Hyde and Clara Dunn, their vision of a community based on values of love, unity and equality continues to animate the endeavours of Australian Bahá'ís.

The Bahá'í community has long served as a workshop in which many questions relevant to the progress of our society have been explored: How can people of diverse backgrounds be brought together in unity? How can men and women be engaged in activities conducive to their spiritual, social and intellectual development? How can children be raised free from prejudice towards an illusory "other"? How can youth navigate this crucial stage of their lives and be empowered to direct their energies to the advancement of civilisation?

Since the 1990s, the introduction of a training institute, popularly known as the Ruhi Institute, has provided a



Participants in a major youth conference held in Brisbane in 2013 prepare an artwork about community building.

systematic means for many people to explore such questions and to build capacity for service to the community. This has set in train a fresh approach to community building, now unfolding in neighbourhoods and small settings throughout the country, from inner-city suburbs to the outback, resulting in both individual and collective transformation.

These community building efforts involve four core elements: devotional gatherings, study circles, children's classes, and a spiritual empowerment program for young teenagers. Anyone is welcome to join these endeavours. Young people are often at the forefront, impelled by their energy, keen sense of justice, and desire to contribute to social progress and the construction of a better world.

DEVOTIONAL GATHERINGS

Devotional gatherings in homes and public settings foster the spiritual character of the community. All are welcome to enter, offer prayers, be inspired by passages from the sacred scriptures of the world, and to meditate and reflect.

Devotional gatherings can help people connect with their neighbours to build supportive friendships, thereby strengthening the social fabric of local communities. They lead naturally to discussions on the well-being and flourishing of one's locality.

“And the honour and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good.”

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



CHILDREN’S CLASSES

Children and young people play a vital role in all facets of community life. They need environments in which they can meaningfully contribute their talents and capacities towards the betterment of the community - not just in the future, but today.

Children’s classes are designed to help children to acquire moral qualities or virtues, such as love, truthfulness and justice, and to develop patterns of behaviour that lead to a fruitful and productive life.

JUNIOR YOUTH SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

The junior youth spiritual empowerment program caters to teenagers aged 12-15. It provides a safe space in which they can learn,

with the assistance of older youth, to navigate this crucial stage in their lives and to explore their identity and the social forces in the world around them.

An integral part of the program is the initiation of small-scale community service projects through which participants respond to needs in their communities, and are empowered to see themselves as positive agents of change.

STUDY CIRCLES

Study circles provide settings in which people can develop spiritual insights and practical skills for service to the community. Through a sequence of highly interactive courses, participants study the Bahá’í Writings together and reflect on how to apply them in their individual and collective lives.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

The Australian Bahá'í community has made a progressive contribution to movements towards peace, human rights, moral education, elimination of racism, interfaith dialogue, and environmental protection. Often undertaken in partnership with other groups and individuals, these efforts sometimes take the form of small-scale projects carried out in response to local needs.

Drawing insights from the Bahá'í Writings and experience in applying them to community life, the Baha'í community also contributes to thought and discussion on subjects crucial to the progress of our society such as social cohesion, the equality of women and men, the role of the media, the role of youth, and the positive part that religion can play in the life of our society.

On an individual level, many young Australian Bahá'ís devote a voluntary “year of service” to assisting their fellow citizens in cities, towns and rural areas.

In their professional lives, Australian Bahá'ís have contributed in diverse fields including law, business, health, academia, public policy, international development, sport, media, the arts, and the community sector.



Australian Bahá'í musicians Shidan and Shadi Toloui-Wallace perform at the Parliament of the World's Religions, Melbourne, 2009.

“The values of love, acceptance and unity, as taught by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, are a source of understanding, compassion and purpose that enrich our community and help make our multicultural, multi-faith society one of the most harmonious on earth. On these special holy occasions, I thank the Australian Bahá'í community for your commitment to these ideals and for ensuring our nation remains a beacon for peace, harmony, and acceptance.”

— The Hon. Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister of Australia.

(Message to an event marking the anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, October 2019).



The Shrine of the Báb, Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

Following the example set by Effie Baker in the 1920s, many Australians have served as volunteers at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Australian Bahá'ís have provided skills and expertise in a wide range of capacities including research, legal affairs, the development of administrative systems, and the sustainable development of the spectacular Bahá'í gardens surrounding the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel.

Two Australian Bahá'ís, Dr. Peter Khan and Mr. Stephen Hall, have been elected as members of the Universal

House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'ís from Australia have assisted the development of Bahá'í communities across the Pacific including those in Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Timor-Leste. In turn, Bahá'ís from these nations have enriched the life of the Bahá'í community in Australia.

Australian Bahá'í artists, writers, composers and performers have created music and literature that is much loved by the global Bahá'í community.

ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

*“The utterance of God is a lamp,
whose light is these words: Ye are
the fruits of one tree, and the leaves
of one branch. Deal ye one with
another with the utmost love and
harmony, with friendliness and
fellowship. He Who is the Daystar
of Truth beareth Me witness! So
powerful is the light of unity that it
can illuminate the whole earth.”*

- Bahá'u'lláh

The Bahá'í Faith is a religion whose pivotal teaching is the oneness of humanity: that we are all equal members of a single human family, who share this planet as our common home.

The Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith was Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892).

He taught that all the world's religions stem from the same divine source and represent the progressive unfoldment of God's guidance to humanity.

The Bahá'í teachings provide high standards for personal conduct and our relationships with one another, based on recognition of the nobility of every human being.

Daily prayer and meditation is encouraged to foster our spiritual life and connection to God.

BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES

Bahá'u'lláh's revelation sets out principles that guide Bahá'ís in their individual and collective lives, and in working towards a more united, peaceful and prosperous world.

These principles include:

-  every person has the capacity and obligation to seek out truth and to contribute towards the advancement of society
-  women and men are equal
-  community decisions should be made through a consensus-based process known as consultation in which all voices can be heard
-  religion and science are essential and complementary systems of knowledge and practice
-  unity must lie at the heart of any enduring endeavour for positive social change.

The Bahá'í teachings also address the nature and purpose of Revelation, and humanity's interactions with the natural world.

There are more than five million Bahá'ís worldwide, who come from all backgrounds and walks of life. The Bahá'í Faith is established in virtually every country and territory across the world.

“Shed the light of a boundless love on every human being whom you meet, whether of your country, your race, your political party, or of any other nation, colour or shade of political opinion. Heaven will support you while you work in this ingathering of the scattered peoples of the world beneath the shadow of the almighty tent of unity. ”

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá





www.centenary.bahai.org.au
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