



Photo courtesy Darren Hiebert

The nine-sided Baha'i House of Worship in Wilmette, Ill., reserves its main floor for prayer and readings from any faith tradition. The national meeting of delegates to choose the nine-member Council for the faith met in April in a basement conference room.

Baha'is gather near Chicago

By Darren Hiebert

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Special to the Times

I just returned from the Baha'i National Convention, which I attended as one of 171 delegates from across the country. I was elected as the delegate for the region covering the northern half of Alabama and small parts of Tennessee and Georgia. The convention was held April 23-26 at the Baha'i House of Worship, near Chicago.

The purpose of the Baha'i National Convention is to elect the National Spiritual Assembly, the governing council of the Baha'is of the nation, and for the delegates to offer constructive suggestions on national activities and plans.

Baha'i elections are unique in that we do not allow nominations or campaigning – no one runs for office. Every adult believer in the country is eligible to be elected.

Each delegate prayerfully and privately votes for nine people whom he or she believes possess the necessary qualities. The nine people receiving the most votes are elected, without having sought the office. Those elected regard it as an obligation and honor to serve. They are responsible only to God—not to those who elect them.

The members that we elected to the council this year form a typically diverse set. They include one Native-American, three African-Americans and a Persian. Four of the nine members are women. A Native-American woman, Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, was elected by the council as its chairperson.

I regard the council that we elected as our gift back to the American Baha'i community.

The primary focus of our discussions was on the latest stage of a process launched worldwide 13 years ago. This process has as its goal the development of a devotional atti-

Commentary

tude that increases one's motivation and capacity to engage in spiritual development and in acts of service to humanity.

At the heart of this process is the realization that service to humanity is the channel for the expression of the spirit of faith. According to the Baha'i scriptures, "By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds."

The Huntsville and Madison Baha'i communities are actively engaged in this process locally. We implement this process in three ways: Engaging in devotional meetings with our friends and neighbors for shared, collective worship; education of the young in the development of spiritual virtues; and systematic study of the word of God to develop our capacity for service to humanity.

My lasting memory of the convention was the atmosphere of love, nurturing encouragement and mutual support that existed among the delegates.

Now that I have returned, I will be visiting Baha'i communities throughout the region, giving detailed reports of the convention.

Further information on the Baha'i Faith can be obtained at <http://www.bahai.us>. Local information at 425-2882.

Huntsville's Interfaith Mission Service's Hometown Pilgrimage will be joining a devotional service with the Baha'is June 14, 11 a.m., in the old church at Burritt on the Mountain, one of the events of the

The Times welcomes reports of denominational, ecumenical, interfaith and activist activities from readers. Please contact kay.campbell@htimes.com

Conference Report

Darren Hiebert, a leader in the local Baha'i community, reports a recent national conference of Baha'is in America. C4