

2000 Bahá'í Conference on Social and Economic Development for the Americas

NINE POINTS - A Conceptual Framework to Prepare Youth for Service

Workshop for Young Adults 15 - 30

Coordinated by Nancy McIntyre for EcoAg Service - a program for apprentices in the art of agriculture and community

Facilitators:

Sam DuBois, Ecuador

Arthur Lyon Dahl, Switzerland

Thomas Mitchell, USA

Cecil Cook, South Africa

Holly Hanson, USA

Ben Rhodd, Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation, USA

Nancy McIntyre, USA

Ron Whitmore, USA

Dramatic readings coordinator: Alexandra Sasha Williams, USA

NINE POINTS is a conceptual framework developed with and for apprentices in the art of agriculture and community, and this orientation applies equally to other types of service. NINE POINTS is a distillation of universal principles and their practical application as emphasized by EcoAg Service, a Bahá'í inspired not-for-profit organization. *

Among the goals of the Year 2000 National Teaching Plan for Bahá'ís of the United States are to encourage leadership and initiative among youth and to strengthen social and economic development. Both of these goals underlie the NINE POINTS orientation program, as do some of the themes discussed by the Bahá'í International Community in "Who is Writing the Future?" (1999): service as expression of self, an evolving concept of unity, and the coherence of spiritual and practical realities.

Early on, as the EcoAg Service regional apprenticeship program expanded into a small-scale international agricultural service opportunity, the need for orientation became apparent.

Apprenticeship is often difficult with physical discomfort, adjustment to a different culture even within one's own country, loneliness, and sometimes disillusionment. One's values and beliefs can be tried.

In the spring of 1997, eight experienced and new apprentices gathered with EcoAg board members at the Louis Gregory Bahá'í Institute in South Carolina to talk about what would be helpful to older youth starting an apprenticeship or other period of service. Consultation continued informally and with many new faces at the mountain farm of an EcoAg board member and gradually grew into NINE POINTS. These steps start with a young adult's search for individuation and truth and progress through community at many levels to discovery of one's place in the wholeness of life.

1. Apprenticeship as Quest/Investigation of Truth

The expectation of quest recognizes that challenges bring opportunity for unexpected and sometimes life changing experience and new patterns of thinking. An attitude of quest in both small and large moments of life is an initiative toward the responsibility for individual investigation of truth.

2. Gifts of Work in the Spirit of Service

Search for oneself and one's place in the world happens within the context of community — community at all levels. To work, whether paid or as a volunteer, with a spirit of service to community gives purpose and meaning to life and corresponds to worship. To see oneself as part of a larger whole augments, rather than diminishes, the concept of self.

3. Unity of Creation/Sustainability

Recognition of unity in the world of being leads to awareness of issues of sustainability. Choices regarding the natural world and the use or abuse of its resources reflect our values and understanding of the world.

Arthur Lyon Dahl of Geneva, Switzerland, is an experienced ecologist who coordinates environmental monitoring and reporting for the United Nations. To this third point, he adds: "We must understand the parts, but also the whole system with its complex interrelationships, bringing the perspectives of science and religion together. Many environmental impacts are slow or cumulative, and not immediately visible; but spiritual values encourage a long-term perspective. Sustainability in the use of resources requires the principles of moderation and respect for ecological balance.... Our inner life and the environment are interrelated. Physical cleanliness has a spiritual effect. By extension, a more natural unpolluted environment will influence us spiritually. A more spiritual attitude toward the creation will also lead us to respect and steward it."

4. Dynamic Coherence Between Spiritual/Practical

Beliefs show in what we do. Spiritual principles (which might be called values that are in harmony with human nature) provide guidelines, motivation, and the will to find answers to life's practical requirements. Material matters are illumined by the spiritual, as a lamp is made useful by the light that comes through it.

5. Unity of Mankind/Community Building

Personal growth is sterile outside of the context of community development. Creative community building is a from-the-ground-up and inclusive process that begins with listening. Recognition of choices can be a catalyst for development, and the most important thing developed is the capacity of community members.

6. Unity in Diversity/Developing Trust in One's Capability

Unity is the coining together of parts into one and, in contrast to uniformity, implies diversity within the whole. To see diversity as inherent in unity provides a starting point for developing trust in our own capability and that of others. To go further and see oneself as a learner frees us for disciplined and creative search.

7. Unity of Religions or Cultures/Attitude of Consultation

Acceptance of the concept of unity in diversity points to the basic unity of cultures and essential oneness of the world's religions. Even when a situation does not allow for the unifying practice of consultation, we can maintain an attitude of consultation - the appreciation that each part contributes an aspect of truth to the whole.

8. Creativity/Relationship to the Creator

Openness, preparation and commitment are qualities that magnify new ways of seeing whether it be the manner in which one searches (Quest), creative action (Creativity), or our daily response to the Creator, the Infinite.

“O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.”

-The Arabic Hidden Words, #4 (Bahá'í Publishing Trust)

9. Sharing & Reflection/Coming to Know What It Is We Know

As both individuals and cultures, we may not fully recognize what we know until we hear our own knowledge reflected back from others or from within ourselves. The arts are a form of communication, a reflection, in which we experience truth in new ways. Reflection of the Creator brings florescence and blessing to all facets of life.

Ron Whitmore, experienced apprentice, PhD student, Fellow, and Scholar at Michigan State University says it this way: “Personal development, though a distinctly individual process, is also advanced largely through communal connections. Any personal quest is therefore incomplete without both individual reflection and opportunities to share new knowledge with a larger community.”

Nancy E. McIntyre

with grateful acknowledgment of the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith and statements by the Bahá'í International Community and appreciation for the insights of John Bradley who founded EcoAg Service. For information on NINE POINTS: 828—649—0066

* EcoAg Service is a not-for-profit organization that links young adults with apprenticeship opportunities in the practice of an agriculture that attempts to foster community at all levels. For information contact: ecoag@main.nc.us