

World-wide Bahais meet in St. Louis this week

WILMETTE, ILLINOIS—Between eight and ten thousand Baha'is are expected to gather in St. Louis, Miss., between Aug 29 and Sept. 1 to commit themselves to participation in a world-wide five-year program for the expansion of their Faith.

Among the participants will be representatives from many of the 6,000 Baha'i communities in the United States as well as visitors from as far away as Australia, Iceland, Iran, and Brazil. The conference, will be the largest gathering of Baha'is ever to assemble on the American continent.

In the United States, the Baha'i five-year plan contemplates a significant increase in the religion's national membership. The number of communities where Baha'is reside is to grow at least 40 per cent from the current level of roughly 6,000. The number of local Baha'i administrative

institutions—Local Spiritual Assemblies—is to expand at least 50 per cent. There are now more than 900 Assemblies—is to expand at least 50 per cent. There are now more than 900 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States.

The upcoming conference in St. Louis will be conducted by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, the religion's principal administrative agency in this country, and one of 115 such institutions in the world. It is a nine-member body elected annually by representatives of Baha'i communities in every state.

This distinctive pattern of organization also holds true at the local level, where Baha'i communities annually elect Local Spiritual Assemblies to guide their Baha'i activities. The election for each nine-member Local Assembly is by secret ballot,

and no electioneering or any kind of nominations are permitted. These Local Assemblies in every region will coordinate much of the activity called for by the Baha'i five-year plan.

Since there is no clergy in the Baha'i Faith, the elected lay institutions administer the affairs and regulate the conduct of Baha'i communities. They arrive at decisions through prayerful consultation. The view of the majority prevails.

At the apex of the Baha'i administrative order is the Universal House of Justice, elected every five years by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies. This international Baha'i administrative institution developed the five-year plan that is now being implemented world-wide.

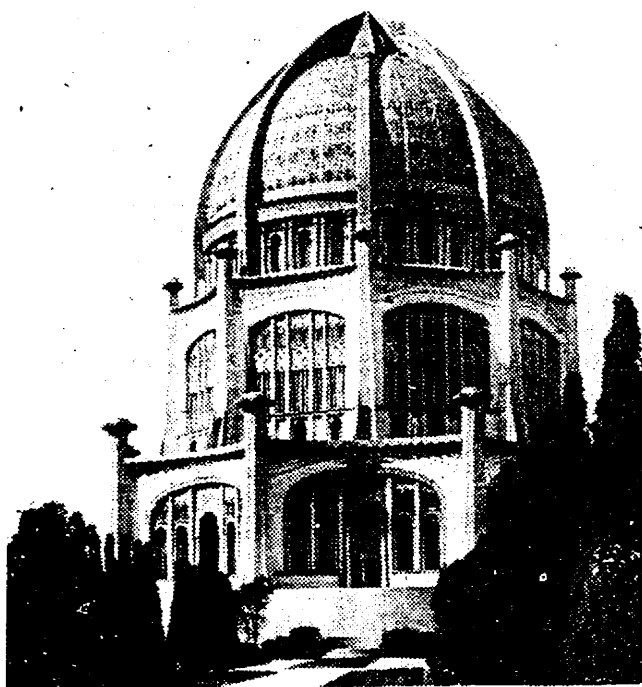
As in the United States, Baha'is in the more than 300 independent countries and territories where the Baha'i Faith has been established will participate in the intense period of development ahead. Sixteen new National Spiritual Assemblies are to be elected, in such countries as Sierra Leone, Cyprus, Somalia, and the Bahama Islands. Two new Baha'i Houses of Worship to seven. The new structures will be built in India and Western Samoa. One of the existing Houses of Worship is in Wilmette, Illinois, where the National Center of the Baha'i Faith in this country is located.

Teh Baha'i Faith, an independent religion, has been established in the United States since 1893. The first American Baha'i was Thornton Chase, a Midwestern insurance executive.

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Baha'is believe that from the beginning of time at certain intervals, God has sent a Divine Educator—such as Moses, Jesus Christ, or Muhammad—to establish spiritual and social guidelines for the advancement of civilization and to enable each man and woman to develop nobler qualities.

Baha'u'llah, whose names means "The Glory of God," was one of these Divine Educators, Baha'is believe.



Wilmette Bahai House of Worship.