



'The Lifeblood of the Cause'

How one community keeps it flowing

LOOKING AT OURSELVES we seemed a scruffy lot, prone to defining ourselves by what we lacked. Our self-concept had become slightly warped. It took the act of giving to scrub away at the mirror and help us look not at what we found undesirable in ourselves but at what we were capable of achieving.

We're not a large community nor are we rich. We have about 20 members including children with most of us living in one room apartments, shared accommodation or small flats. We don't especially hang out with each other but when we meet for Bahá'í activities we enjoy each other's company. It's a strong, active community. The fund, however was flabby and out of shape.

Contributions to the fund bordered on low to very low. Initially, our monthly income was £40 and £30 of that was sent to the National Spiritual Assembly. Without the financial means, the community could not partake of any material and social benefits and the spiritual muscles that come from giving and being generous were atrophying.

Two sources galvanised us into action. Spirit and Form seminars emphasised the spiritual benefits of a healthy fund and introduced new methods to contribute to the fund and the National Spiritual Assembly made an urgent plea for a national fund in crisis. The Local Spiritual Assembly decided, out of a deep sense of love and obedience for the institutions, that it would double its donations to the National Spiritual Assembly and it would do so through regular sustained contributions rather than fund raising events.

To implement this the Local Spiritual Assembly took several lines of action. Talking about the fund had to become a normal part of community life. At the feast, stories about the fund were read, visual graphs of the incoming contributions and outgoing expenses were shown and standing orders, gift aids, receipts and so on were explained. We were encouraged to view contributing to the fund as something that could occur outside the arena of the feast. Simultaneously, the Local Spiritual Assembly began to do some housekeeping: it bought receipt books, ledger books and systematised giving out receipts at feasts. As the incoming line of our graph increased we felt a growing sense of confidence.

Standing orders allowed the Local Spiritual Assembly to have an idea of its real budget and it began to make decisions accordingly. The National Spiritual Assembly had stated that a community contribution of £75 per month to the National Fund was the minimum amount needed to provide for national affairs. The Local Spiritual Assembly set this target as its goal and quickly decided to increase it to £90.

We have very few children in the community but we wanted them to have the opportunity to attend Thomas Breakwell school so a monthly contribution of £20 was set and another £15 monthly contribution for the regional board.

As any gym instructor will tell you the brain works better with exercise. It was time to do

some laps. We made our first big financial splash and bought a £600 exhibition display board. As a result it served as an extremely useful teaching tool at a two day country show. Since then the Local Spiritual Assembly has decided to start a deputisation fund to help community members with different needs and is buying further outdoor exhibition stands.

It's hard, in today's society, to imagine how money could be part of a unifying force. However, the level of maturity in our community has visibly grown as a result of having to realise both the responsibility and joy of contributing and allocating financial resources. And funnily enough, giving ourselves a super cardiovascular workout, has increased the energy of the community, enlarged the capacity of the community heart and started to attract souls to the Faith.

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