

Bahá'í World News Service

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In 1961, Baha'is in 21 Latin American and Caribbean nations for the first time held a national convention and elected a National Spiritual Assembly. Before then, those countries had been part of four large regional assemblies. Raising up national assemblies was key to preparing for the election two years later of the Universal House of Justice.

Below are photographs of the 21 assemblies taken shortly after their election. In some cases, there is also a group photo of those who attended the convention as delegates or observers.

Each of the conventions was honored by the presence of one of the Hands of the Cause of God – individuals appointed to a uniquely high rank who guided the affairs of the Bahá'í community from 1957, when the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith passed away, to 1963, when the Universal House of Justice was elected.

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ARGENTINA: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Argentina pose in front of the sign declaring the gathering to be the first national Baha'i convention in that country – at Ridvan 1961. Members are, standing from left, Shapoor Saeed, Miguel Angel Paniagua, Cinar Torres López, and Hushmand Taraz. Seated, Cayetano Liardo, Adela Tormo, Mary Binda, José Mielnik, and Ricardo Schwartzman. Mr. Paniagua and Mr. Schwartzman are still living and were special guests at the 50th national convention at Ridvan 2010.

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ARGENTINA: Hand of the Cause Hermann Grossmann, seated center, attended the first national convention and is pictured here with the other participants. Dr. Grossmann had been born in Argentina in 1899 to German parents, although when he was 10 they returned to Germany. Seated to Dr. Grossmann's right is his wife, Anna.

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BOLIVIA: This photograph was taken following the second election of the National Spiritual Assembly in 1962.

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BRAZIL: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly are pictured with Hand of the Cause 'Alí Akbar Furútan, seated front center. Members of the assembly are Mario Dantas, Rangvald Taetz, Habib Taherzadeh, Aldemir Lima, Vivaldo Ramos, Nilza Taetz, Margot Worley, Edmund Miessler, and Muriel Miessler.

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BRAZIL: Those who attended the first national convention pose for a photograph with Hand of the Cause 'Alí Akbar Furútan, seated center.

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CHILE: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly included, from left, Sergio Aparicio Caro, Lina Gianotti, Fabienne Guillon, Edmundo Fuchslocher, Letizia Franchino, Carlos Martínez, Emma Cabezas, Enrique Aguirre, and Alejandro Reid. Mr. Aparicio and Mr. Reid are still active members of the community, and Mr. Aparicio was scheduled to attend the 2010

national convention as a delegate.

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CHILE: Those who attended the first national Baha'i convention, held in Santiago at Ridván 1961, are shown with Hand of the Cause Hermann Grossmann. In the back row, from left, are Erica de Fuchslocher, (person behind pillar unidentified), Edmundo Fuchslocher, Enrique Aguirre, Carlos Martínez (partially hidden), Marcela Soto, (hidden person unidentified), Ema Cabezas, Dennis Berry, Edward Roe (partially hidden), (unidentified), and Gastón Larrain. In front, Yolanda Pizarro, Mercedes Llaña, Anna Grossmann, Millicent Bravo, Mrs. Mingorance, Dr. Grossmann, Carmen Iglesias, Fabienne Guillon, Rebeca Padilla, Lina Gianotti de Smithson, Lina Smithson, and Sergio Aparicio Caro.

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COLOMBIA: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly were, back row from left, Charles Hornby, A.K. Kalantar, Luis Montenegro, and Ervin L. Thomas. In front, Leonor Porras, Jamshid Meghnot, Marjorie Weddell, Habib Rezvani, and Gloria de Fritzsche.

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COLOMBIA: Hand of the Cause Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í is pictured with the nine delegates to the first national Baha'i convention. The delegates were from eight local Spiritual Assemblies – Barranquilla, Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Cali, Cartagena, Manizales, Medellín, and Pereira.

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COSTA RICA: The first National Spiritual Assembly is pictured with Hand of Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádem, seated third from left. Standing, from left, are Teodoro Cortazzi, José Barquero, Edgard Gómez, Humberto Ulloa, Richard Mirkovich, and Antonio Soto. Seated are John Rutan, Estéban Canales, Mr. Khádem, and Aaron Barnes.



COSTA RICA: Participants at the 1961 national convention are shown with Hand of the Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádem (fourth from left in the lowest row of those



CUBA: Seven members of the first National Spiritual Assembly are pictured with Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga.

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ECUADOR: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly are, from left, Gayle Woolson, Juan Luis Aguirre, Guillermo Sotomayor, Raúl Pavón Mejía, Dorothy Campbell, David Beckett, Khalílu'llah Bihjati, Fereydoun Monadjem, and Patricia Conger.

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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga, back row center, is pictured with the nine members of the first National Spiritual Assembly. In back from left are Manuel García, Manuel Caminos, Benito Pérez, Mr. Olinga, Félix Gomez, and Wilfred Rowland. Seated in front are Sheila Rice-Wray, Ana Daisy García, Frieda Van Haunten, and Celestino Gómez.

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EL SALVADOR: The National Spiritual Assembly formed in 1961 included, back row from left, Napoleón González, Quentin Farrand, Marcia Steward de Matamoros, Rafael García, Marco Antonio Martínez, and Jeanne de Farrand. In front, José María Padilla, Marta de Herrador, and Gabriel Torres Solórzano. Mr. and Mrs. Farrand and Mr. Torres Solórzano attended the 50th convention at Ridvan 2010 and shared their memories of the early years. The celebration included the official inauguration of a new national Bahá'í Center in San Salvador and an evening program attended by representatives from government, various religions, the diplomatic corps, and other groups. Hand of the Cause William Sears attended the convention in 1961.

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GUATEMALA: This is believed to be the first National Spiritual Assembly of Guatemala, elected in 1961. The national archives in Guatemala have been damaged, owing in part to the earthquake of 1976, and a number of documents and photographs were lost.

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GUATEMALA: The participants at the first national Baha'i convention of Guatemala, held in April 1961. Near the center of the row seated on chairs is Hand of the Cause William Sears.

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HAITI: The first National Spiritual Assembly included, from left, Eustace Bailey, Alcide Narris, Jean Désert, Joseph Albert Bajoux, Ellsworth Blackwell, Andre St. Louis, Joseph Pierre, Ruth Blackwell, and Circe Brantome.

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HAITI: Delegates to the first national Baha'i convention in Haiti, held in April 1961.

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HONDURAS: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly were, top row from left, George Haley, Luis Bouche, Roberto Ancker, and José López. Seated are Vivian Haley, Wanita George, Shirley Ross, Mazie Haylock, and Olinda Andrade.

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JAMAICA: Hand of Cause Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í attended the 1961 national convention and is pictured here with the other participants.

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JAMAICA: The first National Spiritual Assembly of Jamaica included, standing from left, Randolph Fitz-Henley, William A. W. Mitchell, Alfred Senior, and Clarence Ullrich. Seated, Alice Maud Gallier, Percival Aiken, Emily Taylor, and Margarite Ullrich.

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MEXICO: The participants of the first national Baha'i convention in Mexico are pictured with Hand of the Cause Paul Haney (back row).

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MEXICO: The nine members of the first National Spiritual Assembly, elected at Ridvan in 1961.

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NICARAGUA: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly, elected in 1961, were, standing from left, Salomón Escalante Elizondo, Jorge Valentine Harper, Hooper Dunbar, and Donald R. Newby. Seated, Pablo Pérez Toledo, Leticia A. M. de Escalante, Armando Fonseca Duval, Ruth E. Yancey, and Oscar Lizano Solano. Mr. Dunbar went on to serve in a number of Latin American countries and later, from 1988 until Naw-Ruz 2010, was a member of the Universal House of Justice. Ms. Yancey – known as Ruth Pringle after her marriage – later offered 20 years of distinguished service as a member of the Continental Board of Counselors. In addition to Nicaragua, over the years she also lived in Puerto Rico, Honduras, Panama, and Costa Rica, which was her final post before her passing.

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NICARAGUA: Delegates to the first national convention are pictured with Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone (back row center).

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PANAMA: Hand of the Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádem is shown with members of the first National Spiritual Assembly. Standing, from left, are Fredrick Berest, Alfred E. Osborne, Alan Pringle, Harry Haye, and Kenneth Frederics. Seated are James V. Facey, Raquel Constante, Mr. Khádem, Donald Witzel, and Adolphus Holder. Mr. Witzel went on to serve a number of years on the Continental Board of Counselors and more recently has been a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Venezuela.

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PANAMA: Those who attended the first national convention are shown with Hand of the Cause Dhikru'lláh Khádem, seated second from right.

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PARAGUAY: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly were Azadullah Akbari, Amir Azapanah, Keihanosh Azapanah, Angélica Doldán, Francisco Laterza, Rosa de Laterza, Ruiyi Shunahne, Aníbal Torres, and Luis van Strate.

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PERU: Delegates and attendees of the first national Baha'i convention, held at Ridvan 1961.

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PERU: The first National Spiritual Assembly of Peru included, standing from left, Jorge Bejar, Enrique Sánchez, Grover González, and Demetrio Molero. Seated, César Benavides, Mercedes Sánchez, Lester Long, Josefina Kawamoto, and Guillermo Aguilar.



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URUGUAY: Hand of the Cause 'Ali Akbar Furutan, seated in the front row, attended the first national convention. He is pictured with the delegates and other attendees.

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URUGUAY: The nine members of the first National Spiritual Assembly are pictured following their election in 1961.



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VENEZUELA: Members of the first National Spiritual Assembly were, standing from left, Anselmo Torres Morales, Aziz Mohtadi, Hans Voss, Camila Grandi, Feliciano Bourrillon, and Eduardo Maa Gamarra. Seated in front are Marines de Caro, Blanca de Campos, and Chana de Voss.

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VENEZUELA: Hand of the Cause Ugo Giachery, in back, attended the first national convention. He is pictured with some of the participants.

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