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DEVELOPING DISTINCTIVE BAHA'I COMMUNITIES
GUIDELINES FOR SPRITIUAL ASSEMBLIES
Office of Assembly Development
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PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

To All Local Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Baha'i Friends,

To assist Local Spiritual Assemblies in their efforts to rise to the new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities, Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies has been revised and the National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to provide you with this publication as a ready reference to facilitate your consultations.

Local Spiritual Assemblies have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to "rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes." The Supreme Body tells us, "They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations." Further, the progress in the evolution of the institutions must be "manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believers" capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action."

Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies is a compilation of the Baha'i writings designed to aid Local Spiritual Assemblies in applying the principles of Baha'i Administration with wisdom and love. In addition to the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, the Guidelines offer the current policies and general practices of the National Spiritual Assembly in administering the affairs of the American Baha'i Community.

[xxxiv] In its infallible wisdom, the Universal House of Justice has explained that "the plan to which we are now committed is set at one of the most critical times in the life of the planet." The Supreme Body emphasized that "the need at this exact time is so to intensify our efforts in building the Baha'i System that we will attract the confirmations of Baha'u'llah and thus invoke a spiritual atmosphere" that will stimulate the release of "pent-up forces,"

bring about large-scale growth of the Baha'i community, and "change the direction of human affairs throughout the planet.

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHA'IS OF THE UNITED STATES
MARCH 1998

1„THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

Ordained by God
[1.1] The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counselors to the number of Baha.... It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth.
Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, par. 30

Let no one, while this System is still in its infancy, misconceive its character, belittle its significance or misrepresent its purpose. The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day.... Its consummation [is] the advent of that golden millennium„the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Baha'u'llah.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 156-57

The Uniqueness of the Administrative Order
The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System„the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.
Baha'u'llah, in The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 146

The Spiritual Assemblies to be established in this Age of God, this holy century, have, it is indisputable, had neither peer nor likeness in the cycles gone before. For those assemblages that wielded power were based on the support of mighty leaders of men, while these Assemblies are based on the support of the Beauty of Abha. The defenders and patrons of those other assemblages [1.2] were either a prince, or a king, or a chief priest, or the mass of the people. But these Spiritual Assemblies have for their defender, their supporter, their helper, their inspirer, the omnipotent Lord.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings ofAbdu'l-Baha, p. 82

This Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Baha'u'llah has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. Nowhere in the sacred scriptures of any of the world's religious systems, nor even in the writings of the Inaugurator of the

Babi Dispensation, do we find any provisions establishing a covenant or providing for an administrative order that can compare in scope and authority with those that lie at the very basis of the Baha'i Dispensation.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 145

Pattern for Future Society
Baha'u'llah...has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well asAbdu'l-Baha after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 19

Aided by the Spirit of God
These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender isAbdu'l-Baha. Over them He spreadeth His wings. What bounty is there greater than this? These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings ofAbdu'l-Baha, p. 80

[1.3] Basic Administrative Unit of Baha'u'llah's World Order
The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Baha'u'llah's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Baha'i society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Baha'u'llah's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Baha'i flock.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to the Baha'is of the World

Development of Local Spiritual Assemblies
Newly-born Institutions
Local Spiritual Assemblies are at the present newly-born institutions, struggling for the most part to establish themselves both in the Baha'i community and in the world. They are as yet only embryos of the majestic institutions ordained by Baha'u'llah in His writings....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 30, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in the

future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 6-7

The Baha'i administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only first beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful,„how to live together as a community of Baha'is, according to the glorious teachings.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 28

The Guardian is, doubtless, well aware of the existing imperfections in the administrative machinery of the Cause, but these, he strongly feels, should be attributed not to the administrative system itself, but to the administrators of the Faith, who by reason of their human limitations and imperfections can never hope to entirely fulfill those ideal conditions set forth in the Teachings. Much of the [1.4] existing defects in the present-day activities of the believers, however, will as the Community develops and gains in experience be gradually removed, and healthier and more progressive conditions prevail. And it is towards the realization of this high aim that the friends should earnestly and unitedly strive.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 34

Assembly Development Related to Entry by Troops
As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Baha'i Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Baha'i community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Baha'u'llah has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress toward that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Baha'i community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is a matter of immediate importance to Baha'u'llah's avowed supporters in all lands.

For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the

institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the function of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believer's capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Baha'i membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 153, to the Baha'is of the World

[1.5] Strengthening and development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is a vital objective.... Success in this one goal will greatly enrich the quality of Baha'i life, will heighten the capacity of the Faith to deal with entry by troops which is even now taking place and, above all, will demonstrate the solidarity and ever-growing distinctiveness of the Baha'i community, thereby attracting more and more thoughtful souls to the Faith and offering a refuge to the leaderless and hapless millions of the spiritually bankrupt, moribund present order.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to the Baha'is of the World

The establishment and strong growth of Local Spiritual Assemblies is one of the most fundamental requirements for the spread of the Message of Baha'u'llah, the development of Baha'i community life and the emergence of a transformed society.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 6, 1977, to National Spiritual Assemblies

Salient Objectives
Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Baha'i flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Baha'is with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 30, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
AND THE BAHA'I COMMUNITY

Attitude of Assembly Members

Unity within the Assembly itself is, of course, of immediate importance to the wider unity your actions are intended to foster and sustain. At no time can any member of your Assembly afford to be unmindful of this basic requirement nor neglect to work towards upholding it. Of particular relevance is the attitude that the members adopt towards their membership on that exalted body. There needs to be a recognition on their part of the Assembly's spiritual character and a feeling in their hearts of respect for the institution [1.6] based upon a perception of it as something beyond or apart from themselves, as a sacred entity whose powers they have the privilege to engage and canalize by coming together in harmony and acting in accordance with divinely revealed principles. With such a perspective the members will be better able to acquire an appropriate posture in relation to the Assembly itself, to appreciate their role as Trustees of the Merciful and to counteract any impression that they have assumed ownership and control of the institution in the manner of major stockholders of a business enterprise.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The members of these Assemblies, on their part, must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Baha'i Community and promote the common weal.

Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 41

Through their repeated appeals, through their readiness to dispel all misunderstandings and remove all obstacles, through the example of their lives, and their unrelaxing vigilance, their high sense of justice, their humility, consecration and courage, they must demonstrate to those whom they represent their capacity to play their part in the progress of the Plan in which they, no less than the rest of the community, are involved.

Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, p. 12

The Cause...is a divine institution whose responsible administrators should consider themselves as mere channels whereby God protects and guides His Faith. The Administration should never be allowed to become a bone of contention between individuals and groups. It stands above human personalities and transcends the scope of their limited and inevitably selfish ideas. Its custodians should continually purge themselves of every trace of personal desire or interest and become wholly imbued with the spirit of love, of cooperation and of genuine self-sacrifice.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated August 8, 1933

Only as individual members of Local Spiritual Assemblies deepen themselves in the fundamental verities of the Faith [1.7] and in the proper application of the principles governing the operation of the Assembly will this institution grow and develop toward its full potential.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August, 1970, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 5

For upon the degree to which the members of these Assemblies grasp the true significance of the divine institution on which they serve, arise selflessly to fulfill their prescribed and sacred duties, and persevere in their endeavors, depends to a large extent the healthy growth of the world-wide community of the Most Great Name, the force of its outward thrust, and the strength of its supporting roots.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 25, 1975, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

The Relation of the Assembly with the Baha'is
There is no task more urgently necessary than the insurance of perfect harmony and fellowship among the friends, especially between the local assemblies and individual believers. The local assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the local assembly: the two must learn to cooperate, and to realize that only through such a cooperation can the institutions of the Cause effectively and permanently function. While obedience to the local assembly should be unqualified and whole-hearted, yet that body should enforce its directions in such a way as to avoid giving the impression that it is animated by dictatorial motives. The spirit of the Cause is one of mutual cooperation, and not that of a dictatorship.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 28, 1935,
in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23

The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the feelings among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly is a part of themselves, that their cooperative interactions with the divinely ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revolutionizing purpose of Baha'u'llah's Revelation, by a consciousness of the high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose, and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy. In such a climate, [1.8] the community is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without losing their individual uniqueness....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Baha'i can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion, and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other.

The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of

those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 63-64

The temperament of authority in the administration of justice varies according to the degree of the gravity of each case. Some cases require that the Assembly take action that is firm or drastic.[1.9] Even so, Assembly members have always to be mindful that the authority they wield must in general be expressed with love, humility and a genuine respect for others. Thus exercised, authority strikes a natural note and accords with that which is acceptable to spiritually attuned and fair-minded souls.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with a firm determination to act with justice in all the cases which are submitted to them for their consideration.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 9, 1934,
in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23

These bodies have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect and guide the believers in every way within their power when appealed to„indeed they were established just for the purpose of keeping order and unity and obedience to the law of God amongst the believers.

"You should go to them as a child would to its parents...."
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, September 28, 1941,
in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 16

The Relation of the Baha'is with the Assembly

In order to avoid division and disruption, that the Cause may not fall a prey to conflicting interpretations, and lose thereby its purity and pristine vigor, that its affairs may be conducted with efficiency and promptness, it is necessary that every one should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decisions, enforce their decree, and cooperate with them whole-heartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Movement throughout all regions.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 41

The Guardian believes that a great deal of the difficulties from which the believers...feel themselves to be suffering are caused by their neither correctly understanding nor putting into practice the administration. They seem„many of them„to be prone to continually challenging and criticizing the decisions of their assemblies. If the Baha'is undermine the very leaders who are, however immaturely, seeking to coordinate Baha'i activities and administer [1.10] Baha'i affairs, if they continually criticize their acts and challenge or belittle their decisions, they not only prevent any real rapid progress in the Faith's development from taking place, but they repel outsiders who quite rightly may ask how we ever expect to unite the whole world when we are so disunited among ourselves!

There is only one remedy for this: to study the administration, to obey the assemblies, and each believer seek to perfect his own character as a Baha'i. We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weaknesses of others, if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise, and we can really help the Cause through our example and spiritual strength. The Baha'is everywhere, when the administration is first established, find it very difficult to adjust themselves. They have to learn to obey, even when the assembly may be wrong, for the sake of unity. They have to sacrifice their personalities, to a certain extent, in order that the Community life may grow and develop as a whole. These things are difficult, but we must realize that they will lead us to a very much greater, more perfect, way of life when the Faith is properly established according to the administration.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 26, 1943,
in The National Spiritual Assembly, pp. 34-35

We should respect the National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assembly because they are institutions founded by Baha'u'llah. It has nothing to do with personality, but is far above it. It will be a great day when the friends, on and off the assemblies, come to fully grasp the fact that it is not the individuals on an assembly which are important, but the assembly as an institution.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 13, 1944,
in The National Spiritual Assembly, pp. 18-19

The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally and internationally, is divinely conferred on elected institutions. However, the power to accomplish the tasks of the community resides primarily in the mass of

the believers. The authority of the institutions is an irrevocable necessity for the progress of humanity; its exercise is an art to be mastered. The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and surges at the level of collective volition. In its potential, this mass power, [1.11] this mix of individual potentialities, exists in a malleable form susceptible to the multiple reactions of individuals to the sundry influences at work in the world. To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions, untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization.

Individual initiative is a pre-eminent aspect of power; it is therefore a major responsibility of the institutions to safeguard and stimulate it. Similarly, it is important for individuals to recognize and accept that the institutions must act as a guiding and moderating influence on the march of civilization. In this sense, the divine requirement that individuals obey the decisions of their Assemblies can clearly be seen as being indispensable to the progress of society. Indeed, individuals must not be abandoned entirely to their own devices with respect to the welfare of society as a whole, neither should they be stifled by the assumption of a dictatorial posture by members of the institution.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The friends are called upon to give their whole-hearted support and cooperation to the Local Spiritual Assembly, first by voting for the membership and then by energetically pursuing its plans and programs, by turning to it in time of trouble or difficulty, by praying for its success and taking delight in its rise to influence and honor. This great prize, this gift of God within each community must be cherished, nurtured, loved, assisted, obeyed and prayed for.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to the Baha'is of the World

Also relevant to effecting unity is the attitude of the friends, whether serving on any Assembly or not, towards the exercise of authority in the Baha'i community. People generally tend to be suspicious of those in authority. The reason is not difficult to understand, since human history is replete with examples of the disastrous misuse of authority and power. A reversal of this tendency is not easily achievable, but the Baha'i friends must be freed of suspicion towards their institutions if the wheels of progress are to turn with [1.12] uninterrupted speed. A rigorous discipline of thought and action on the part of both the friends and the National Assembly will succeed in meeting this challenge; both must live up to their responsibilities in this regard by recognizing some fundamental realities.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS RELATION TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The National Spiritual Assembly

Its Authority and Significance

The National Spiritual Assembly shall have exclusive jurisdiction and authority over all the activities and affairs of the Baha'i Faith throughout its area.
The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice,
By-Laws, Article III, p. 9

All matters arising within a local Baha'i community which are of purely local interest and do not affect the national interests of the Cause shall be under the primary jurisdiction of the Spiritual Assembly of that locality, but decision whether a particular matter involves the interest and welfare of the national Baha'i body shall rest with the National Spiritual Assembly.
Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, 1975, Article VII, Section 8

Whatever functions and powers are not specifically attributed to Local Spiritual Assemblies in these By-Laws shall be considered vested in the National Spiritual Assembly, which body is authorized to delegate such discretionary functions and power as it deems necessary and advisable to the Local Spiritual Assemblies in its jurisdiction.
Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, 1975, Article X

I wish to reaffirm in clear and categorical language, the principle already enunciated upholding the supreme authority of the National Assembly in all matters that affect the interests of the Faith in that land. There can be no conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any sphere of Baha'i jurisdiction whether local, national, or international.
Shoghi Effendi, June 11, 1934, in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 12

The Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the N.S.A. is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith...and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Baha'is, delegates, groups, and Assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be whole-hearted and unqualified. He is convinced that the unreserved [1.13] acceptance and complete application of this vital provision of the Administration is essential to the maintenance of the highest degree of unity among the believers, and is indispensable to the effective working of the administrative machinery of the Faith in every country.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 11, 1934,
in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 28

Its Relation with Regional Baha'i Councils

The expansion of the Baha'i community and the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies in certain countries have brought the Cause to a new stage in its development. They have caused us in

recent years to examine various aspects of the balance between centralization and decentralization. In a few countries we have authorized the National Spiritual Assemblies to establish State Baha'i Councils or Regional Teaching and Administrative Committees. From the experience gained in the operation of these bodies, and from detailed examination of the principles set forth by Shoghi Effendi, we have reached the conclusion that the time has arrived for us to formalize a new element of Baha'i administration, between the local and national levels, comprising institutions of a special kind, to be designated as "Regional Baha'i Councils."
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 30, 1997, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Regional Baha'i Councils partake of some, but not all, charac- teristics of Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provide a means of carrying forward the teaching work and administering related affairs of a rapidly growing Baha'i community in a number of situations. Without such an institution, the development of a national committee structure required to cover the needs in some countries would run the danger of over-complexity through adding a further layer of committees under the regional committees, or the danger of excessive decentralization through conferring too much autonomy on committees which are characterized by the Guardian asbodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 30, 1997, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

2.2.1 The members of an elected Regional Baha'i Council, who shall be nine in number, are elected from among all the adult believers in the region by the members of the Local Spiritual [1.14] Assemblies in that region every year on 23 May, the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab according to the Gregorian calendar, or on a weekend immediately before or after that date.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 30, 1997, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Its Relation with Local Spiritual Assemblies
Unity is, therefore, the main key to success. And the best way to insure and consolidate the organic unity of His Faith is to strengthen the authority of the local assemblies and to bring them within the full orbit of the National Assembly's jurisdiction. The National Assembly is the head, and the local assemblies are these various organs of the body of the Cause. To insure full cooperation between these various parts is to safeguard the best interests of the Faith by enabling it to counteract those forces which threaten to create a breach within the ranks of the faithful.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, September 20, 1933,
in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 57

It [the Local Spiritual Assembly] shall faithfully and devotedly uphold the general Baha'i activities and affairs initiated and sustained by the National Spiritual Assembly. It shall cooperate wholeheartedly with other Local Spiritual Assemblies throughout the United States in all matters declared by

the National Spiritual Assembly to be of general Baha'i importance and concern.
Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly, pp. 24-25

Just as the individual believers are bound to support and sustain their spiritual assembly, for the preservation of the unity of the Faith and the strengthening of its as yet embryonic World Order, so must the local assemblies obey and sustain their national representatives. The closer the cooperation between the local and national assemblies, the greater will be the power and radiance which can and must stream forth from these institutions to the suffering ranks of humanity.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, July 29, 1942,
in The Local Spiritual Assembly, pp. 27-28

It is obvious that through the consolidation of the foundations of the Administrative Order on the local level, the national institutions of the Faith will receive support and strength in the conduct of their activities. In turn, the National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies should not only oversee the activities of the local communities, but it has the duty and privilege to coordinate the efforts and to stimulate and give direction to the spirit of enterprise and initiative [1.15] of the individual friends. When a proper and balanced relationship is maintained between these two levels of Baha'i activity, and a healthy interaction takes place between them, a foundation is laid for the community to becomespiritually welded into a unit at once dynamic and coherent.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 17, 1981, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Coordinating National and local interests
Local activities should always be subordinated to those of a national character and importance. This is intended not to minimize the role of the local assembly in the administrative order, but to establish and ensure a sane relationship between that body and the national organism of the Cause.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated May 10, 1934, to an individual believer

The Institution of the Learned
In the Kitab-i-'Ahdi (the Book of His Covenant) Baha'u'llah wroteBlessed are the rulers and the learned in Al-Baha," and referring to this very passage the beloved Guardian wrote on 4 November 1931:

In this holy cycle thelearned" are, on the one hand, the Hands of the Cause of God, and, on the other, the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work. As to therulers" they refer to the members of the Local, National and International Houses of Justice. The duties of each of these souls will be determined in the future. (Translated from the Persian)

The Hands of the Cause of God, the Counselors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards fall within the definition of thelearned" given by the beloved Guardian. Thus they are all intimately interrelated and it is not incorrect to refer to

the three ranks collectively as one institution.

However, each is also a separate institution in itself.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 24, 1972,
in Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, p. 215

As you know, a distinguishing feature of the Administrative Order is the existence of elected institutions, on the one hand, which function corporately with vested legislative, executive and judicial powers, and of appointed, eminent and devoted believers, on the other hand, who function primarily as individuals for the [1.16] specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith under the guidance of the Head of the Faith. The two sets of institutions collaborate in their functions so as to ensure the progress of the Cause.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

This Administrative Order consists, on the one hand, of a series of elected councils, universal, secondary and local, in which are vested legislative, executive and judicial powers over the Baha'i community and, on the other, of eminent and devoted believers appointed for the specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith of Baha'u'llah under the guidance of the Head of that Faith.
The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, p. 8

Every institution of this Divinely created Order is one more refuge for a distraught populace; every soul illumined by the light of the sacred Message is one more link in the oneness of mankind, one more servant ministering to the needs of an ailing world. Even should the Baha'i communities, in the years immediately ahead, be cut off from the World Center or from one another„as some have already been„the Baha'is will neither halt nor hesitate; they will continue to pursue their objectives, guided by their Spiritual Assemblies and led by the Counselors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 3, 1980, to the Baha'is of the World

The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament ofAbdu'l-Baha, p. 13

The Hands of the Cause of God
The Hands of the Cause of God are one of the most precious assets the Baha'i world possesses. Released from administration of the Auxiliary Boards, they will be able to concentrate their energies on the more primary responsibilities of general protection and propagation, "preservation of the spiritual health of the Baha'i communities" and "the vitality of the faith" of the Baha'is throughout [1.17] the world. The House of Justice will call upon them to

undertake special missions on its behalf, to represent it on both Baha'i and other occasions and to keep it informed of the welfare of the Cause.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 24, 1968,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, pp. 5-6
(See also in this Chapter the Section entitled "International Teaching Center")

International Teaching Center

The time is indeed propitious for the establishment of the International Teaching Center, a development which, at one and the same time, brings to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land and provides for its extension into the future, links the institution of the Boards of Counselors even more intimately with that of the Hands of the Cause of God, and powerfully reinforces the discharge of the rapidly growing responsibilities of the Universal House of Justice....

The duties now assigned to this nascent institution are:

To coordinate, stimulate and direct the activities of the Continental Boards of Counselors and to act as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice.

To be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts of the world and to be able, from the background of this knowledge, to make reports and recommendations to the Universal House of Justice and give advice to the Continental Boards of Counselors.

To be alert to possibilities, both within and without the Baha'i community, for the extension of the teaching work into receptive or needy areas, and to draw the attention of the Universal House of Justice and the Continental Boards of Counselors to such possibilities, making recommendations for action.

To determine and anticipate needs for literature, pioneers and traveling teachers and to work out teaching plans, both regional and global, for the approval of the Universal House of Justice.

[1.18] All the Hands of the Cause of God will be members of the International Teaching Center. Each Hand will be kept regularly informed of the activities of the Center through reports or copies of its minutes, and will be able, wherever he may be residing or traveling, to convey suggestions, recommendations and information to the Center and, whenever he is in the Holy Land, to take part in the consultations and other activities of the Center.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 8, 1973,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, pp. 46-47

The Continental Boards of Counselors

The Universal House of Justice decided...to establish Continental Boards of Counselors for the protection and propagation of the Faith. Their duties will include directing the Auxiliary Boards in their respective areas, consulting and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the Hands of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice informed concerning the conditions of the Cause in their areas.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 24, 1968,
in Messages from The Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, p. 131

The Counselors are responsible for stimulating, counseling and assisting National Spiritual Assemblies, and also work with individuals, groups, and Local Assemblies.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 1, 1969,
in Messages from The Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, p. 151

We are confident that the institution of the Boards of Counselors will lend its vital support and, through the Counselors" own contacts with friends, through their Auxiliary Boards and their assistants, will nourish the roots of each local community, enrich and cultivate the soil of knowledge of the teachings and irrigate it with the living waters of love for Baha'u'llah. Thus will the saplings grow into mighty trees, and the trees bear their golden fruit.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 25, 1975,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, pp. 63-64

The Continental Boards of Counselors and the National Spiritual Assemblies share in the functions of propagation and protection, but the Counselors specialize in these functions from a different level and in a different manner. From a continental vantage point, the Counselors bring a perspective to their functions which, when offered to a National Assembly in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions, or commentary, enriches the [1.19] latter's understanding, acquaints it with a broader experience than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision.

An aspect of the difference in the manner of functioning of the Counselors derives from the instructions given in the Will and Testament ofAbdu'l-Baha to the Hands of the Cause of God, the extension into the future of whose functions of protection and propagation is the responsibility of the Counselors. As appointees of the Universal House of Justice, the Counselors assist the Head of the Faith to broaden the base, foster the strength and ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institutions and communities under their jurisdiction. Through their Auxiliary Boards, the Continental Counselors spread the benefits of their functions to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the grassroots of the community. These functions are shaped by their obligations, in the words of the Will and Testament,to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things." It can be seen, then, that through their work in propagating and protecting the Faith, the Counselors play a major role in knitting and bolstering the entire fabric of the Baha'i community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Auxiliary Board Members
The beloved Guardian's message of October 1957 [cited in Messages to the Baha'i

World, pp. 124-30] clearly indicates that the two Auxiliary Boards must have distinct but complementary functions. In that message he charges the Protection Board withthe specific duty of watching over the security of the Faith" and says that the duty of the Propagation Board wouldhenceforth be exclusively concerned with assisting the prosecution of the Ten- Year Plan" [1953-1963].

Protection Boards

Above all, members of the Protection Boards should concentrate on deepening the friends" knowledge of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it, on clearly and frankly answering, in conformity with the teachings, whatever questions may trouble any of the believers, on fostering the spiritual profundity and strength of their faith and certitude, and on promoting whatever will increase the spirit of loving unity in Baha'i communities.

Propagation Boards

The primary tasks of the Propagation Boards, however, are to direct the believers" attention to the goals of whatever plans have [1.20] been placed before them, to stimulate and assist them to promote the teaching work in the fields of proclamation, expansion, consolidation and pioneering, to encourage contributions to the funds, and to act as standard-bearers of the teachers of the Faith, leading them to new achievements in the diffusion of God's Message to their fellow human beings.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 10, 1976, to the International Teaching Center

It is the Spiritual Assemblies who plan and direct the work, but these plans should be well known to the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members, because one of the ways in which they can assist the Assemblies is by urging the believers continually to support the plans of the Assemblies.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 1, 1969,
to the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies,
in Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, p.152

When a Local Spiritual Assembly begins to function properly, it does not mean it can dispense with the service and work of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, who can and should continue to provide stimulation and inspiration not only generally to the Assembly and local Baha'i activities, but to individual believers as well.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 9, 1980, to an individual believer

Above all the Auxiliary Board members should build up a warm and loving relationship between themselves and the believers in their area so that the Local Spiritual Assemblies will spontaneously turn to them for advice and assistance.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 1, 1969,
to the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies,
in Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, pp.152-153

Their Supporting Role

Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. It is the principal task of the Auxiliary Boards to assist in arousing and releasing this power. This is a vital activity, and if they are to be able to perform it adequately they must avoid becoming involved in the work of administration.... The Auxiliary Boards should work closely with the grass roots of the community: [1.21] the individual believers, groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies, advising, stimulating and assisting them.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 1, 1969,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, pp. 37-38

Relation to Administrative Work
Assemblies sometimes misunderstand what is meant by the statement that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members are concerned with the teaching work and not with administration. It is taken to mean that they may not give advice on administrative matters. This is quite wrong. One of the things that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members should watch and report on is the proper working of administrative institutions. The statement that they do not have anything to do with administration means, simply, that they do not administer. They do not direct or organize the teaching work nor do they adjudicate in matters of personal conflict or personal problems. All these activities fall within the sphere of responsibility of the Spiritual Assemblies.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 1, 1969,
in Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973, p. 32

Systematic Visits and Correspondence with Communities
Our beloved Guardian urged Auxiliary Board members to establish contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups, isolated centers and the individual believers, and through periodic and systematic visits to localities as well as by correspondence help in promoting the interests of the Plan, assist in the efficient and prompt execution of the goals, watch over the security of the Faith, stimulate and strengthen the teaching and pioneer work, impress upon the friends the importance of individual effort, initiative and sacrifice, and encourage them to participate in Baha'i activities and be unified under all circumstances.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 17, 1971

Referring Matters
The question has been raised as to how Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual believers are to know which matters they should refer to which Auxiliary Board member. We feel that this will be worked out at the local level in the light of experience, and that meanwhile the Assemblies and believers should not concern themselves unduly about it. They should feel free to refer to either Board, and if the Auxiliary Board member feels that the matter would better have been referred to his colleague, he can either himself pass the question on, or suggest the different approach to the Assembly or believer. This is similar to the situation, already familiar to Board members, when they have referred to them a matter which should [1.22] properly be dealt with by a

National Spiritual Assembly or one of its committees.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 10, 1976, to the International Teaching Center

Flexibility and Speed in Response
Support Maturation
The flexibility and speed with which the Counselors and their Auxiliary Board members can respond to a perceived need in the community„such as a need for encouragement, explanation of plans, deepening in the Teachings, protection of the Covenant„are elements of their functioning which distinguish them from Spiritual Assemblies; this flexibility enables them to operate as occasions demand, whether it is in giving counsel at a meeting, or advising an individual in private, or helping the friends to understand and obey a ruling of the Spiritual Assembly, or dealing with issues of the Covenant. In such different modes these officers of the Faith are able to draw attention to relevant Texts, to impart information, explore situations, and acquaint themselves with conditions in ways not possible to a Spiritual Assembly but important to the success of its plans. They are able then to share with Spiritual Assemblies, as deemed necessary, ideas, analyses, perceptions, and advice which inevitably enhance the ability of these Assemblies to serve their communities. They thus assist Assemblies to mature. Where Local Assemblies are new or weak, Auxiliary Board members help them to understand their functions, encourage them to organize their work, and rally the local believers in support of their Assemblies" initiatives.

Prop and Mainstay of National Spiritual Assembly
Through the various modes of their activities, the Counselors aided by their Auxiliary Boards spark and buttress the growth and development of Spiritual Assemblies and local and national communities. With this perspective, Shoghi Effendi's regarding of the Auxiliary Board members asa prop and mainstay to the often overworked and overburdened National Spiritual Assemblies" becomes clear. The indispensability of the involvement of Continental Counselors and Auxiliary Board members in the planning stages of the teaching work and the benefits of acquainting them with the hopes and concerns of National Spiritual Assemblies and of seeking their advice are also obvious.

Free to Determine Manner of Support
While the Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards, in addition to the discharge of their specific responsibilities, will support the initiatives adopted by a National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should recognize that the Counselors must be free to determine, [1.23] according to their own best judgment, in what manner that support will be given. There is a great difference between the functions of national committees and Auxiliary Board members in this respect. Whereas the committees may be required by the Assembly to follow particular procedures, Auxiliary Board members are not similarly bound; yet they should not act in a manner that undermines the operations of the National Assembly or its agencies. This does not mean that Auxiliary Board members may not decide, upon request or not, to participate in the execution of a particular programme

or educational project devised by a national committee, or even to contribute towards the conceptualization and fruition of the project. It does mean, however, that their prerogative to proceed within a wider latitude than that accessible to the national committee should be respected.

Should not Divert Attention from Adopted Plans

By working at the grassroots of the community, an Auxiliary Board member is often able to satisfy a need not being met by any national or local programme, but which if dealt with by the Auxiliary Board member will better equip the local friends to achieve the established goals of the community. Such a flexibility on the part of the Auxiliary Board member in dealing with immediate situations, such a freedom for independent action, should be taken for granted by all concerned. However, a pattern of activity on the part of the Auxiliary Board member, or even of a Counselor, which appears to the National Assembly to be seriously diverting attention from the adopted plans of the community should unhesitatingly be made a matter for remedial consultation with the Counselor.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 5, "Protection of the Faith," for further information on the relation of the Protective Boards to the Local Spiritual Assembly; and Chapter 7, "Teaching and Consolidation," for further information on the relation of the Propagation Boards to the Local Spiritual Assembly)

The Assistants to the Auxiliary Board Members

We have decided to take a further step in the development of the institution by giving to each Continental Board of Counselors the discretion to authorize individual Auxiliary Board members to appoint assistants....

Their aims should be to activate and encourage Local Spiritual [1.24]
Assemblies, to call the attention of Local Spiritual Assembly members to the importance of holding regular meetings, to encourage local communities to meet for the Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days, to help deepen their fellow-believers" understanding of the Teachings, and generally to assist the Auxiliary Board members in the discharge of their duties.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 7, 1973,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, p. 54

One of the most potent aids to the consolidation of local communities and Assemblies and the deepening of the faith of the believers, is the services of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants. Here is an institution of the Faith, reaching into every locality, composed of firm believers who know the area they have to serve and are familiar with its problems and potentialities„an institution expressly designed to encourage and reinforce the work of the Spiritual Assemblies, to enthuse the believers, to stimulate them to study the Teachings and apply them in their lives„ a body of Baha'is whose efforts and services will complement and support the work being done by your committees and by the Local Assemblies themselves in every sphere of Baha'i endeavor.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 2, 1976, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Believers Can Serve Both as Assistants and on Administrative Institutions
Appointment of a believer as a Board member's assistant does not require the resignation of the appointee from a Spiritual Assembly or a committee. The House of Justice leans towardsassistants" not retiring from administrative work, although in consultation with their Spiritual Assembly it may be quite in order; it would be preferable, however, for the suggestion to come from the appointee and not from the Spiritual Assembly.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 10, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Assistants Who Are Also Members of an Administrative Institution
Assistants who are members of a National Assembly or a national committee do not function as assistants in relation to that body, and they have the same duty to observe the confidentiality of its consultations, and of matters considered by the Assembly to be confidential, as does any other member. An assistant can, of course, be a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly, but his task here as an assistant is to help the Spiritual Assembly to function harmoniously and efficiently in the discharge of its duties and this will hardly succeed if he gives the Assembly the feeling that he is [1.25] reporting privately everything it does to the Auxiliary Board member. He should, on the contrary, do all he can to foster an atmosphere of warm and loving collaboration between the Local Assembly and the Board member.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 2, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 3, "Organization of the Local Spiritual Assembly," for further information on confidentiality)

SUGGESTED READINGS

The Covenant and the Administrative Order
Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, pp. 217-23

Will and Testament ofAbdu'l-Baha

God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 158-329
The World Order of Baha'u'llah, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 141-57
The Covenant, compiled by the Universal House of Justice

Electing Baha'i Assemblies, published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 1997

The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin and Our Attitude Toward It, compiled by the National Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

A Miracle of Governance: the Local Spiritual Assembly, a video and workbook deepening program prepared by the Office of Assembly Development of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, 1997

March of the Institutions, Eunice Braun

Eternal Covenant, Lowell Johnson

Covenant of Baha'u'llah, Adib Taherzadeh

The National Spiritual Assembly
The National Spiritual Assembly, compiled by the Universal House of Justice

The Local Spiritual Assembly
The Local Spiritual Assembly, compiled by the Universal House of Justice

2„THE FORMATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

FORMING THE ASSEMBLY

Obligation to Form
[2.1] It is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine, a localSpiritual Assembly" be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision. The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local Houses of Justice....
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 37

Shoghi Effendi feels that in any locality where the number of adult believers reaches nine, a local Assembly should be established. He feels this to be an obligation rather than a purely voluntary act. Only in exceptional cases has the National Spiritual Assembly the right to postpone the formation of an Assembly if it feels that the situation does not warrant such a formation. This right, however, should be exercised if the situation absolutely demands it.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 46

Historical Perspective
In developing the Administrative Order, the Guardian established the First Day of Ridvan as the day when all Local Spiritual Assemblies should be elected. During his own lifetime, this practice was followed as the number of Local Assemblies steadily grew to over one thousand.

In the subsequent two decades the Faith expanded greatly, especially in the rural areas of the world, often remote and difficult to reach. In view of this development, the Universal House of [2.2] Justice decided in 1977 that, in certain cases, when the local friends failed to elect their Spiritual Assembly on the First Day of Ridvan, they could do so on any subsequent Day of the Ridvan festival. This permission did not apply to all localities, but to those that, in the judgment of the National Spiritual Assembly, were particularly affected by such factors as illiteracy, remoteness, and unfamiliarity with concepts of Baha'i administration. The House of Justice also gave permission at the beginning of the Five Year Plan for Assemblies being formed for the first time to be elected at any point during the year.

Responsibility of Baha'is in the Locality
These provisions have enabled the believers in a large number of localities to receive assistance in electing their Local Spiritual Assemblies, and much experience has been gained in strengthening Local Assemblies under diverse conditions in a vast array of cultural settings. Nevertheless, in principle, the initiative and responsibility for electing a Local Spiritual Assembly belong primarily to the Baha'is in the locality, and assistance from outside is ultimately fruitful only if the friends become conscious of this sacred responsibility. As progress is made in the training of human resources and in the development of the entire range of Baha'i community life, the capacity of the friends to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies on their own will certainly grow.

Election Day:
First Day of Ridvan
With these thoughts in mind, we have decided that, beginning at Ridvan 1997, the practice of electing all Local Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day of Ridvan will be reinstituted. We recognize that the immediate result my be a reduction in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies at Ridvan 1997, but we are confident that subsequent years will witness a steady increase.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 26, 1995,
to the Conference of the Continental Boards of counselors

Annual Meeting
The Annual Meeting of the Corporation [the Local Spiritual Assembly] at which its Trustees shall be elected shall be held on the first day of Ridvan, being that period between sunset on April 20 and sunset on April 21, at an hour and place to be fixed by the Spiritual Assembly, which shall give not less than fifteen days" notice of the meeting to all members of the local Baha'i community.

Section 1. The Spiritual Assembly shall accept those votes transmitted to the Assembly before the election by members who by reason of sickness or other unavoidable reason are unable to be present at the election in person.

[2.3] Section 2. The election of members to the Spiritual Assembly shall be by plurality vote [whereby candidates that have obtained the highest number of votes, regardless of whether they received a majority of the votes cast, are elected].

Section 3. All voting members of the local Baha'i community are eligible for election as members of the Spiritual Assembly.

Section 4. The Spiritual Assembly shall prepare an agenda for the Annual Meeting in which shall be included reports of the activities of the Assembly since its election, a financial statement showing all income and expenditure of its fund, reports of its committees and presentation of any other matters pertaining to the affairs of the Baha'i community. The Assembly, both preceding and following the Annual Election, shall invite discussion and welcome suggestions from the community in order that its plans may reflect the

community mind and heart.

Section 5. The result of the election shall be reported by the Spiritual Assembly to the National Spiritual Assembly.
Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, Article XI, By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly .

Preparation for the Annual Meeting
The Local Spiritual Assembly may wish to begin in early March to prepare for the Annual Meeting by taking the following steps:

´ Schedule the Annual Meeting to take place during the period between sunset on April 20 and sunset on April 21. (An Annual Meeting held at any other time will invalidate the election.)
´ Determine the place of the meeting.
´ Notify all voting members (those twenty-one and over) of the time and place of the Annual Meeting and provide instructions for absentee ballots. (See also in this Chapter, Section entitledAbsentee Ballots')

If the Assembly is to be re-formed, fifteen days" notice should be given. Failure to give at least fifteen days" notice, however, will not necessarily invalidate the election. (When a Local Spiritual Assembly is formed for the first time, advance notice should be given; however, no specific time period is required.)
´ Appoint tellers (at least two) to count the votes at the election.
(See also in this Chapter, Section titled "Tellers")
´ [2.4] Instruct the tellers, one of whom should be designated chief teller.

The following steps should be taken at the Annual Meeting before voting:

´ Read the qualifications for Assembly membership and procedures for voting
´ Provide ballot paper
´ Update the adult membership list

Announce at the meeting all persons who have transferred in or out of the community since the election notices were sent. A current voting list may be provided for every adult; or, where this is not feasible, copies of the adult membership list should be available at the time of the election.

Agenda
The Local Spiritual Assembly sets the agenda for the Annual Meeting. The following agenda is provided merely as an example of how the Assembly might wish to organize the meeting:

´ Opening prayers
´ Presentation of the Annual Report
´ Consultation and questions on the Annual Report
´ Reading of election call
´ Introduction of tellers and instructions on voting procedure
´ Final call for absentee ballots

´ Announcement of persons who have recently transferred in or out of the community since the election call
´ Prayer
´ Voting
´ Collection of ballots by tellers
´ Consultation on the development of the community in the coming year
´ Tellers" report and acceptance by community
´ Closing prayer

Annual Report
The Annual Report is a summary of the community's goals, concerns, activities, and progress of the past year. It should also reflect the nature of the participation of the community in the national and global plans of the Faith. Incorporated Assemblies may also need to submit this report to the state to maintain their incorporation. The [2.5] Annual Report is normally distributed to the community prior to the election of the Assembly, either at the Annual Meeting or in a mailing before the Annual Meeting. (For more information, see also Section titled "Incorporated Assemblies" in this Chapter)

The Local Assembly makes the final determination of what is included in the Annual Report. The following basic information may be included:

´ Name and location of the Spiritual Assembly
´ Date of report
´ Period covered
´ Results of the last annual election and any by-elections
´ Assembly membership and attendance record
´ Vital statistics:
´ total membership of the community
´ makeup of membership„adults, youth, children
´ enrollments for the year
´ transfers in and out, withdrawals, deprivations of
´ administrative rights
´ marriages, births, deaths
´ Nineteen Day Feast (percentage of community attendance)
´ Major local projects and activities, and their progress to date
´ Part played by the community in national and global plans of the Faith, including:
´ extension teaching
´ pioneers sent out
´ community support of national activities
´ Noteworthy developments
´ Financial record
´ expenditures
´ percentage of community participating in the Fund

Reports of Committees
Committee reports should be submitted to the Assembly well before the Annual Meeting. The Assembly will need time to review the reports and to decide what

to include in its own general report to the community. (Or the Assembly may simply add the committee reports as an addendum to its report.) Altogether, the yearly reports prepared by the Assembly and its committees constitute the Annual Report of the Local Spiritual Assembly which must be kept in the permanent files of the Assembly. A copy of the report should be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly and may also be shared with the Auxiliary Board member(s)

Incorporated Assemblies
[2.6] Incorporated Assemblies may have to meet certain legal requirements to maintain their corporate status. These requirements vary from state to state. The Assembly may, for example, be required to have presented and to have received acceptance of the minutes of the last year's Annual Meeting. Incorporated Assemblies should make sure that they familiarize themselves with and adhere to the state requirements.

Tellers
The tellers are appointed by the outgoing Spiritual Assembly. Any Baha'i, adult or youth, in good standing may serve as teller; however, the Chief Teller should be an adult. The task includes:

´ Collecting the ballots
´ Counting the ballots
´ Making certain that the ballots are valid
´ Recording the results
´ Reporting the results to the election meeting

Submitting to the local and National Spiritual Assembly a report signed by all tellers. This report becomes part of the permanent records of the community.

In addition, the Chief Teller is responsible for organizing the work of the tellers, announcing the results of the election and any other relevant information desired by the electors, and ensuring that the election report is signed by all tellers

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Counting the Ballots"; Chapter 3, Section titled "Service of Children and Youth")

ELECTION PROCESS

The Spirit and Character of Baha'i Elections
On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.
Shoghi Effendi, translation of letter dated February 27, 1923, to Persian believers, in "Extracts from the Guardian's Letters on the Spiritual Character of Baha'i Elections," p. 1

I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and

discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing [2.7] for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 47

Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 65

The elector...is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold. Moreover, the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust, inasmuch as it gives the right...to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favor of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 136

Let them exercise the utmost vigilance so that the elections are carried out freely, universally and by secret ballot. Any form of intrigue, deception, collusion and compulsion must be stopped and is forbidden.
Shoghi Effendi, translation of letter dated March 8, 1932, to Persian believers, in "Extracts from the Guardian's Letters on the Spiritual Character of Baha'i Elections," p. 2

One's vote should be kept confidential. It is not permissible to make any reference whatsoever to individual names. The friends must avoid the evil methods and detestable practices of the politicians. They must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections; otherwise the outcome will be chaos and confusion, serious difficulties will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmation of God will be cut off.
Shoghi Effendi, translation of letter dated January 16, 1932, to Persian believers in "Extracts from the Guardian's Letters on the Spiritual Character of Baha'i Elections," p. 2

Qualifications for Membership
It is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best [2.8] combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 88

If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Baha'i Assemblies...we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 88

In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Baha'i office, whatever its nature. But these are only an indication, they do not mean people who don't fulfill them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated October 24, 1947,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in "Extracts from the Guardian's Letters on the Spiritual Character of Baha'i Elections," p. 3

Concerning the qualifications of the members of the spiritual assembly; there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the spiritual assembly as an institution, and the persons who comprise it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow-believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. The existence of elections is a sufficient indication that assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgment is defective. For asAbdu'l-Baha has repeatedly emphasized Baha'i assemblies are under the guidance and protection of God. The elections, specially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Baha'i assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated, the institution of the [2.9] spiritual assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, pp. 9-10

Physical Handicaps
In view of the spiritual principles which must guide the elector in selecting those he feels are best fitted to serve on the Assembly, and to preserve the unfettered freedom of the voter, a believer should not be arbitrarily considered ineligible for Assembly membership because of physical handicaps. The handicapped person, seemingly incapable of taking part in consultation, may in fact be able to function quite adequately, provided his fellow Assembly members are determined to find ways in which they can help him to participate. In the Baha'i community for anyone to be elected, a sufficient number of voters must have prayerfully considered that believer fitted to serve. If the elected

Assembly finds that one of its members is unable to function, the question of declaring a vacancy may be considered.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 15, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Representation of Minorities
Bearing in mind the extreme desirability of having the minority elements participate and share responsibility in the conduct of Baha'i activity, it should be the duty of every Baha'i community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the diverse minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Baha'i representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these diverse elements, racial or otherwise, as possible.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 35-36

The Benefits of Electing New Members
Shoghi Effendi has never said that the members of the National Assembly have to be renewed partially every year. The important thing is that they should be properly elected. It would be nice if there should be new members elected, for new blood always adds to the energy of the group and will keep up their spirit. But this depends entirely upon the will of the delegates as represented in the result of their voting.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated October 1932

He was very happy to see that changes had been made in membership of the N.S.A. this year, not from any reasons of [2.10] personality, but because change itself is good and brings a fresh outlook into the discussions of any assembly. He was also pleased to see that these changes involved more younger people being on the N.S.A.; with the tremendous amount of work which this...Plan is going to involve, this will be a great help to the older members of that body.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 18

Eligibility to Vote or Hold Office

Age
Upon attaining the age of twenty-one years, a Baha'i is eligible to vote and to hold elective office.
By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article V

Members of the Institution of the Learned The exalted rank and specific functions of the Hands of the Cause of God make it inappropriate for them to be elected or appointed to administrative institutions, or to be elected as delegates to national conventions.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 1964, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 42

Auxiliary Board members are eligible to be elected. Therefore, a ballot should not be invalidated because it contains the name of a member of an Auxiliary Board. The basic principle involved is that the Board member himself must

decide whether or not to accept his election. As you have stated in your letter, if the membership in a Baha'i community drops to nine, including the Auxiliary Board member resident there, the Auxiliary Board member may serve temporarily as a member of the Assembly to preserve its Assembly status.
The Universal House of Justice,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, p. 33

All adult Baha'is, including members of the Auxiliary Board, are eligible to vote in elections for delegates or in elections for members of the Local Spiritual Assembly.
The Universal House of Justice,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, p. 34

Believers can serve at the same time both as assistants to Auxiliary Board members and on administrative institutions.
The Universal House of Justice,
in The Continental Boards of Counselors, pp. 54-55

Residency Requirements
To count as a member of a local Baha'i community for the purpose of forming or maintaining the Local Spiritual Assembly, a believer must be resident in that area of jurisdiction on the First Day of Ridvan. This is the principle. What constitutes "residence" is a secondary matter for each National Spiritual Assembly to decide....

[2.11] It is, moreover, not essential for a person to be physically present to be a resident. There are many instances of a sailor or salesman who spends most of his time moving from place to place but who is indisputably resident in the town where his family lives. All such matters must be decided by the National Spiritual Assembly in the light of the circumstances of each case within the general framework of the definition ofresidence" that it adopts.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 18, 1985,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 20

Students and Others Who Reside in More Than One Community
For example, it may be that a university student spends some six months of the year in the town where his university is, and the other half-year in the home of his parents. In such a case it is normal to permit him to choose which of the two places is to count as his residence for Baha'i purposes; one cannot count as beingresident" in two places at once.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 18, 1985,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 20

Moving after Ridvan
It is a policy of the National Spiritual Assembly that if a Baha'i has made a firm commitment, such as signing a lease or purchase agreement on a house, he is eligible to vote in that community's election or be elected to the Assembly of that community provided that he is able physically to reside in the community within 90 days.

Moving after the Election Calls Have Been Sent
There is no minimum amount of time Baha'is must be residents of a community before they can participate in a Baha'i election. If they move to a community the day of an election, they may participate in it as long as the Assembly is convinced that they are making their home in that community.

Change of Boundaries
Baha'i community membership is often affected by civil boundary changes, and because of this, those who are eligible to serve during one year on the Assembly may not be members of the same community the next year. The National Spiritual Assembly should be notified of all civil boundary changes. No change in a membership list resulting from civil boundary changes should be made until the National Spiritual Assembly approves or acknowledges the changes.

Newly-Enrolled Baha'is
Unless they are from the Middle East (see following section), newly-enrolled Baha'is are eligible to vote in an election or to be elected to a Local Spiritual Assembly, regardless of whether they have received Baha'i identification cards from the National Spiritual Assembly.

[2.12] Pending the transfer of their membership into the United States Baha'i community from the community of the country in which they were last residing, Baha'is with current credentials from other countries (not visitors) may be considered eligible to vote or to be elected to an Assembly. They must submit their credentials (and ask for a return receipt) to the National Spiritual Assembly and request that their membership be transferred to the United States Baha'i community. If, after 60 days, the Baha'is still have not received their United States Baha'i credentials, the National Spiritual Assembly should be notified.

Baha'is without credentials from another country (not visitors) who have not yet received United States Baha'i credentials are not eligible to vote and serve on a Spiritual Assembly until their status has been verified and their transfer has been completed. They must contact their former National Spiritual Assembly and ask that their credentials be sent to the United States National Spiritual Assembly.

Enrollments and Transfers from the Middle East
Any person from Persian background, regardless of their immigration status or length of stay in the U.S., and Middle Easterners may participate in administrative functions only after their enrollments and transfers are confirmed by the National Spiritual Assembly.

Baha'is with Unknown Adresses
If the community membership list includes the names of Baha'is whose mail has been returned, the Assembly should not remove their names from the community list or voting list unless it has been verified that the persons no longer live at their last known address.

Concerning those persons for whom every effort has been made to locate them, to

no avail, the Assembly should notify the National Spiritual Assembly (Attn: Management Information Systems office) and ask that they be removed from the local community's membership list.

(See also Chapter 6, "Community Membership")

Special Circumstances
While this teaching work is commendable those who accept Baha'u'llah under these conditions cannot undertake administrative responsibilities, nor can Local Assemblies be formed in prisons.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 9, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 25

Prisoners
You are free to accept declarations of faith from inmates of a prison, but their participation as voting believers can take place only after they have been discharged from prison.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, 1994 ed., par. 263

Mentally Ill or Senile
[2.13] If a believer is incapable of serving due to mental illness or senility, the Assembly should write to the National Spiritual Assembly, recommending that the person be relieved of administrative service. Until the National Assembly approves the recommendation, the person should continue to be included on the voting list.

Withdrawals
If a person has asked to withdraw from the Faith but the community has not received notice from the National Spiritual Assembly that the withdrawal has been officially accepted, the person is still considered a member of the community, and their name should be included on the voting list.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Election of a Believer Who Has Withdrawn")

Reinstatement from Withdrawal
A person who has previously withdrawn and wishes to be reinstated to Baha'i membership is eligible to vote in an election only after the reinstatement has been approved by the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Spiritual Assembly should send its recommendation to the National Spiritual Assembly, which will then notify the Local Spiritual Assembly upon approval of the reinstatement.

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Withdrawal from and Reinstatement of Membership")

Voting
Sacred Responsibility
These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the friends, and every declared believer of twenty-one years and above, far from standing aloof and assuming an indifferent or independent attitude, should

regard it his sacred duty to take part conscientiously and diligently in the election, the consolidation and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 39

I feel I must reaffirm the vital importance and necessity of the right of voting„a sacred responsibility of which no adult recognized believer should be deprived, unless he is associated with a community that has not as yet been in a position to establish a Local Assembly. This distinguishing right which the believer possesses, however, does not carry with it nor does it imply an obligation to cast his vote, if he feels that the circumstances under which he lives do not justify or allow him to exercise that right intelligently and with understanding. This is a matter which should be left to the individual to decide himself according to his own conscience and discretion.
Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, pp. 3-4

Nine Votes Must Be Cast

[2.14] Inasmuch as Spiritual Assembly membership, according to the principles of Baha'i Administration, has been limited for the present to nine members, it follows that no electoral vote can be effective unless it is cast for exactly that number. It is, therefore, the sacred duty of every Baha'i elector to cast nine votes, neither more nor less, except under special circumstances so as to insure that the results of the elections for the Spiritual Assembly will be effective and on as wide a basis of representation as possible.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated March 27, 1940,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, Lights of Guidance, par.42

Voting for Oneself

A believer has the right to vote for himself during the election time, if he conscientiously feels the urge to do so. This does not necessarily imply that he is ambitious or selfish. For he might conscientiously believe that his qualifications entitle him to membership in a Baha'i administrative body, and he might be right. The essential, however, is that he should be sincere in his belief, and should act according to the dictates of his conscience. Moreover, membership in an assembly or committee is a form of service, and should not be looked upon as a mark of inherent superiority or a means for self-praise.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Dawn of a New Day, pp. 200-201

Voting Absentee

The same procedure in voting should be followed, namely, the ballot should be placed and sealed in an unmarked inner envelope and that envelope placed in an outer envelope marked with the name of the voter....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 21, 1973, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Those Baha'is who are unable to be present at the election may mail in their votes or send them with a Baha'i who will attend the meeting using the ballot paper and the two envelopes provided. The inner envelope in which the ballot is enclosed should have no mark which can identify the voter. The ballot envelope

should be sealed and placed in the second or outer envelope. The outer envelope should have the name and address of the sender and be markedballot." If mailed, the absentee ballot should be mailed enough in advance to ensure its receipt prior to the election date.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitledPreparation for the Annual Meeting')

If a person is unable to fill out a ballot form, he may call a person designated by the Assembly to accept the ballots (usually the Chief [2.15] Teller or the Secretary of the Assembly). The Local Spiritual Assembly should make some kind of arrangements to accept ballots from those who cannot speak or write English or who cannot, for whatever reason, fill out a ballot. (For example, a youth could be designated to fill out the ballot according to the person's wishes.)

Tie Votes
If there is a tie for the ninth member on the Assembly, the community should re-vote to break the tie. An exception to the rule occurs when one of the parties represents a minority.

In case by reason of a tie vote or votes the full membership of an elected body is not determined on the first ballot, then one or more additional ballots shall be taken on the persons tied until all members are elected.
The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Article VI

Q. In the case of a tie between five persons for three vacancies should the names of the five be read for the delegates" vote?

A. Yes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 29, 1971,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, Lights of Guidance, par. 80

Regarding your question about the breaking of tie votes, a balloting to break such a tie vote for members of a Spiritual Assembly may be held after the first day of Ridvan if necessary, but obviously the day of balloting should not be delayed too long.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 4, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In Case of Minority
If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise.... So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots have been cast in an election...[and] are balanced between the various races, faiths or nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 35

There are so many varieties of situations which can occur in respect to

minorities, and in so many different circumstances in different parts of the world, that it is impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule. The two guiding principles are the beloved Guardian's 2.16] statement, which is well known to you, and its concomitant that whenever there is doubt as to what is a minority or whether all other matters are equal a re-vote should be taken.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 27, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly

What is not clearly defined is "majority" and "minority." The Guardian refers tovarious races, faiths or nationalities." Where this is obvious, e.g., in the United States a white American and a Negro, there is no problem. In all cases of doubt a re-vote should be held.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 30, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Policy of the National Spiritual Assembly on What Constitutes a Minority")

Policy of the National Spiritual Assembly on What Constitutes a Minority
The definition of a minority in any locality is in the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is clear that pioneers from other lands should not be regarded as belonging to a minority, neither do the categories quoted by the Guardian in The Advent of Divine Justice namely,faith, race, class or nation," include sex. The overriding principle is always that if there is any doubt as to whether the minority principle should be invoked, then a further ballot should be taken.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 5, 1986,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, Lights of Guidance, par. 84

Since there are many nationalities represented in the United States, and in any given community many members could claim justly to belong to various nationalities, the settling of a tie on the basis of nationality is unworkable. Therefore, the National Spiritual Assembly has established that the question of what constitutes a minority for the purpose of resolving tie votes in Baha'i elections must be determined according to race. At this time, the criteria used to determine a racial minority are those established by the United States government and are not based upon the racial make-up of the Baha'i community. For example, if there is a tie vote between a Caucasian believer and a Hispanic believer, and the majority of the Baha'i community consists of Hispanic believers, the Hispanic believer would be elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly because Hispanic people are considered a racial minority by the United States government. Persians are considered a nationality and not a racial minority.

Counting the Ballots
[2.17] It is for your National Assembly to determine how to properly instruct the delegates beforehand in the recording of identical names on ballots and to give the tellers guidelines for handling these questions when they arise in the counting of the ballots. Thereafter, it is for the tellers to make the decision

and give the results to the Convention or Assembly....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 29, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

As to whether a voter in a Baha'i election has the right to know how many votes he may have received in that election even if he was not elected, it is inappropriate for an individual to raise such a question....

The procedure which applies in the reporting of the results of a Baha'i election is as stated in the letter of 16 December 1965 addressed to your National Assembly by the Universal House of Justice and is recited as follows for your ready reference:

Normal Convention procedure would call for a tellers" report announcing the names of the nine believers elected to the National Spiritual Assembly plus statistical information as to the balance of the votes cast. However, if the Convention votes to have the complete report of the tellers, or any part of it, the Convention is entitled to have the information which will thereupon be presented by the tellers in accordance with the vote of the Convention.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 4, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Invalid Ballots
Under certain conditions an entire ballot may be declared invalid. These are: (1) More than nine names on ballot paper; (2) Less than nine names on ballot paper; (3) Duplication of names. Under other conditions, because of specified irregularities, one or more of the names may be invalidated but the rest of the ballot would be considered valid. These irregularities are: (1) A name not identifiable, or illegible; (2) The name of an ineligible person, such as a youth or person not resident in the jurisdiction of the voting area, provided of course that each ballot contains no more or less than nine names and no name has been duplicated.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 29, 1971,
to a National Spiritual Assembly

Preservation of the Ballots
While it is within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly to determine what to do about preservation of the ballots [2.18] following the annual election, the House of Justice points out that should any question concerning the balloting arise during the year following the election, it would be helpful if the ballots were available for National Spiritual Assembly scrutiny.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
July 22, 1980, Lights of Guidance, par. 93

Election Results and Recognition
Once Assembly elections are over, the results should be conscientiously and unquestionably accepted by the entire body of the believers, not necessarily because they represent the voice of truth or the will of Baha'u'llah, but for the supreme purpose of maintaining unity and harmony in the Community. Besides, the acceptance of majority vote is the only effective and practical way of

settling deadlocks in elections. No other solution is indeed possible.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated July 10, 1939, to an individual believer

Electing Officers
(Please see Chapter 3, Section entitledElecting Officers')

Election with Less Than a Quorum
No quorum is required in the holding of an election for a Local Spiritual Assembly. This rule also applies in the case of By-elections. The mere fact that less than nine vote for the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly does not invalidate the election.

As you know, the National Assembly can always look into the circumstances surrounding a Local Spiritual Assembly election and use its discretion in determining whether, considering all circumstances, the existence of the Local Spiritual Assembly should be recognized.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 16, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

There is no prescribed minimum number of persons required at the annual meeting and the National Spiritual Assembly may, at its discretion, choose to recognize an Assembly even if only a few persons vote.

In all cases, an Assembly should be formed and the formation papers submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly describing any unusual or extenuating circumstances. The National Spiritual Assembly will review the information and decide whether the election is valid or not. In the meantime, those elected should begin to carry out the duties and responsibilities of a Local Spiritual Assembly.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitledWhen to Form')

Resignation of Assembly Member
[2.19] Your Assembly should first have considered whether to accept Miss...'s resignation, and then, if the Assembly had accepted her resignation, the vacancy should have been filled by a By-election....
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
July 6, 1981, Lights of Guidance, par. 88

If one of the elected members declines service on the Assembly, the resignation must be submitted to the newly elected Assembly. (The resignation cannot be considered by the community at the Annual Meeting.)

The newly elected Spiritual Assembly should consult, seeking the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly if necessary, and call for a By-election if a vacancy is declared. Before the person can be replaced, all members of the community must be notified of the need for a By-election.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "By-Elections"; and Chapter 3, Section titled "Resignation")

Election of a Believer Who Has Withdrawn

If, prior to local elections an enrolled believer withdraws from the Faith and this leads to the removal of his name from Baha'i membership, and yet he is subsequently elected to the Local Assembly, such votes as have been cast in his name are disregarded without invalidating the remaining votes on the ballots. If, however, the process of withdrawal has not taken place, that is, the believer refuses on the day of election to participate and expresses then his desire to withdraw from the community, and yet he is subsequently elected to the Assembly, since his withdrawal is generally unknown to the friends, in such a case the remaining eight elected members should meet, consider the withdrawal, and if his name has to be removed from Baha'i membership, a by-election should be held to fill the vacancy.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 11, 1979, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Reporting Election Information to the National Spiritual Assembly

The result of the election shall be reported by the Spiritual Assembly to the National Spiritual Assembly.

By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article XI, Section 5

Before Ridvan, the National Spiritual Assembly sends election forms and instructions to Local Spiritual Assemblies. Communities that have not received the forms should request them from the Management Information Services department at the Baha'i National Center. The [2.20] forms should be completed and returned to the National Assembly immediately following the election (or joint declaration).

Note: It is preferable that Assembly officers be elected and their names forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly on the election (or joint declaration) form. However, if it is not possible to elect officers immediately after the Assembly formation, a temporary secretary (someone to receive mail and telephone calls) should be appointed and recorded on the form, and the form sent in immediately. Permanent officers should be elected and reported as soon as possible on the "Assembly Officer and Address Change" form.

Formation Report Form Not Received

If the Local Spiritual Assembly does not receive the formation report form by the time of the election, the election results may be reported in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly. The report should state whether the Assembly was formed by election or joint declaration and include the date, the name of the Baha'i locality, the names and Baha'i identification numbers of the Assembly members and the number of votes each member received. Also included should be the total number of believers in the community, the number of those voting in person and by absentee ballot, and the names of the tellers. If Assembly officers have been elected, these should also be noted.

Joint Declaration

The National Baha'i Constitution specifies: "When...the number of Baha'is in any authorized civil area is exactly nine, these shall on April 21 of any year,

or in successive years, constitute themselves the Local Spiritual Assembly by joint declaration. Upon the recording of such declaration by the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, said body of nine shall become established with the rights, privileges and duties of a Local Spiritual Assembly...." It can therefore be seen that it is the duty of every Baha'i in such a situation to take part in the joint declaration....

It should also be noted that although the Constitution specifies that the joint declaration is to be made on the First Day of Ridvan, it does not state the manner in which it is to be made. Such subsidiary details are left to the decision of each National Spiritual Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 12, 1969

When Assembly Is to Be Formed for the First Time
When the Spiritual Assembly is to be formed for the first time (by joint declaration) and one or more of the adult believers refuses to join in the declaration, the Spiritual Assembly cannot be formed.

[2.21] The following extract from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Belgium is pertinent to the treatment of the believer, or believers, who refuse to take part in the declaration:

It can therefore be seen that it is the duty of every Baha'i in such a situation to take part in the joint declaration. If a Baha'i, however, refuses to do so he should be helped to realize that he has committed a grave dereliction of his Baha'i duty. In this stage of the development of the Cause a National Spiritual Assembly should not, generally, deprive a believer of his voting rights for such an offense, but should lovingly and patiently educate the friends in the importance of their responsibilities.
Amended by the Universal House of Justice in a letter
dated April 5, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

When Assembly Is to Be Re-formed
When a Local Spiritual Assembly is to be re-formed by joint declaration, the failure or refusal of a believer to take part in the joint declaration would not be a bar to the re-formation of the Assembly. The way the declaration is made is within the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly to determine, and it may or may not require signatures.

It is not necessary that all nine members sign the joint declaration together. One or more may happen to be physically absent on the first day of Ridvan and in such cases the absent members could sign the declaration at a later date, or take part in the joint declaration in such a manner as the National Spiritual Assembly may decide.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 10, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Policy of the National Spiritual Assembly
If a Local Spiritual Assembly is being formed by joint declaration, all members

should sign the joint declaration form. Those who are unavailable to sign at the same time as the others may sign their names earlier or later.

If all signatures cannot be obtained or if any difficulties arise, the Assembly should still form and send the joint declaration form to the National Spiritual Assembly as soon as possible after Ridvan. The Local Spiritual Assembly should include a letter explaining any difficulties and give the reasons for any missing signatures. The joint declaration should be considered valid unless the community is notified otherwise by the National Spiritual Assembly.

Registration of a Baha'i Group
[2.22] Baha'i groups are registered by meeting together to elect a correspondent and other group officers, if needed, and submitting aBaha'i Group Officers Election Report" form to the Baha'i National Center. This form is available from the Management Information Services department at the Baha'i National Center. The group will then begin to receive correspondence from the Baha'i National Center. Although a group may elect officers at any time, it is recommended that it hold a new election each year on the First Day of Ridvan at an annual meeting. All adult believers should be notified of the election at least 15 days in advance.

In principle, Baha'i groups regularly meet and consult together regarding such matters as the observance of Feasts, the development of children's classes, and the planning of teaching events in much the same way as Local Spiritual Assemblies. Decisions are carried by majority vote. Baha'i groups cannot perform the legislative duties of an Assembly, however, such as performing Baha'i marriages or handling cases involving the violation of Baha'i laws. Should an issue requiring the attention of a Local Spiritual Assembly arise, the group should turn to a nearby Assembly for assistance.

The central focus of the Baha'i group should be toward raising itself to Assembly status through teaching efforts. It may enlist the assistance of nearby Spiritual Assemblies, inviting them to adopt their community as an extension teaching goal, or it may request from the National Teaching Committee that traveling teachers be sent to assist with its teaching plans.

By-Elections
Vacancies in the membership of the Spiritual Assembly shall be filled by election at a special meeting of the local Baha'i community duly called for that purpose by the Assembly. In the event that the number of vacancies exceeds four, making a quorum of the Spiritual Assembly impossible, the election shall be under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly.
By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article VIII, Section 2

When it is necessary to fill a vacancy on the Assembly, a by- election should be called. Written notices should be sent to all eligible adult members in the community at least fifteen days before the date of the election. The voting list should include the names of all eligible adult members, including those who may have resigned from the Assembly. (Although a person may have resigned, he or she is still considered eligible to serve on the Assembly.)

A by-election is held only if there are more than nine adults in the community. Otherwise, any vacancy is filled automatically as soon as an adult believer becomes available to serve. Any changes in membership should be recorded in the minutes.

Results of by-elections should be reported to the National Spiritual [2.23] Assembly on aLocal Spiritual Assembly Report of By-Election" form (available from the Management Information Systems office).

Jeopardized Assemblies
He feels that where the dissolution of an Assembly is in question each case should be treated separately in this sense, that if a member moves away permanently, leaving less than nine to function, the Spiritual Assembly should not immediately be dissolved if they, its members, see an immediate remedy in view; in other words if they are going to confirm soon, or receive within a reasonable length of time, someone to take the person's place, they need not give up Assembly status. If they do, for insurmountable reason, fall below Assembly status, then they can only be reconstituted on April 21st. Also if certain members temporarily absent themselves from meetings there is no need to dissolve the Assembly; on the contrary the reluctant ones should be educated and encouraged to reassume their spiritual obligations as believers. A Spiritual Assembly is not based on nine people being available for every single meeting but on nine resident Baha'is doing their best to discharge their duty to the Spiritual Assembly when they are not prevented by illness or absence or some legitimate reason for doing so.
Letter Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 31, 1945,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 22

Once elected (or formed by joint declaration), an Assembly continues to exist until the next annual election or until the National Spiritual Assembly acts to declare the Assembly dissolved. If the number of adult Baha'is in the community falls below nine, or if conditions arise which make it impossible for the Local Assembly to function, the facts should be reported to the National Assembly.

Suggested actions which a jeopardized Assembly might take:

´ Hold a meeting to discuss the status of the community and devise teaching activities. If the Spiritual Assembly is unable to get a quorum, the active members should constitute themselves as a teaching committee and concentrate all their efforts on teaching.
´ Pray together and be unified.
´ Concentrate all activities on teaching.
´ Hold individual firesides. Take individual initiative in teaching.
´ Invite speakers from nearby communities to assist with teaching activities.
´ [2.24] Request a visit through the Baha'i National Center of a traveling teacher.
´ Invite other Baha'i communities and youth in the district to assist with the teaching activities.
´ Use available media to advertise firesides or public meetings.

´ Be sure to talk with friends, neighbors, relatives and associates.
´ Visit nearby Baha'i community Feasts to request homefront pioneers.
´ Keep the National Teaching Committee, the Auxiliary Board members, and their assistants informed of the activities.

JURISDICTION

A Baha'i Locality

A Baha'i locality is the area in which a Baha'i community is situated. The boundaries of the Baha'i locality correspond to the area of jurisdiction of its Spiritual Assembly. Generally, the boundaries of Baha'i localities follow those of the smallest unit of civil jurisdiction, such as the boundaries of an incorporated city, or, outside of a city, the boundaries of a township or county. Whenever the boundaries for a locality are uncertain, boundary clarification and/or guidelines for establishing boundaries can be requested from the National Spiritual Assembly.

Baha'i Boundaries Determined by Civil Boundaries

He wishes me to stress the fact that from now on any group that is formed must belong to one civil community, as otherwise endless confusion and misunderstanding would ensue. The limits of each civil community must be clearly recognized, and no overlapping should be allowed under any circumstances.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i News, #132, January 1940, p. 4

The Guardian fully realizes that the process of splitting up large communities into smaller ones, each existing within its own civil units, has been difficult for the Australian friends. What they do not seem to fully appreciate is that this has been done in Canada and the United States as well, and is only in order to organize the assemblies on a logical basis, and one with a firmer legal foundation. The fact that this may create more assemblies in the end, and that it sometimes breaks up existing ones, is only incidental; the important point is to consolidate the communities on a sound basis, i.e., every assembly within the limits of the Municipality its members reside in.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 83

[2.25] Regarding the formation of local Assemblies, the Guardian does not advise any departure from the principle that every civil community should have its own independent Assembly.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i News, #102, August 1936, p. 2

He realizes that the enforcement of the general rule that an Assembly must function within civic limits has caused considerable havoc in Britain, as well as other countries. However, it enables the friends, through splitting up into smaller communities, to have before their eyes the appetizing prospect of forming yet another Spiritual Assembly, all on their own, so to speak. It gives more believers the opportunity to serve on these Administrative Bodies, challenges the teaching activities of them all, and stimulates them to fresh efforts in the hope of early victory.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Unfolding Destiny, p. 381

Annexed Areas
Suburban or unincorporated areas surrounding a central city or town can only be included in the Local Assembly area of the central entity if they are annexed by the civil authorities....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 29, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Area of Jurisdiction
The National Spiritual Assembly shall have exclusive jurisdiction and authority over all the activities and affairs of the Baha'i Faith throughout its area.
The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, p. 9

Among its more specific duties a Local Spiritual Assembly shall have full jurisdiction of all Baha'i activities and affairs within the local community subject, however, to the exclusive and paramount authority of the National Spiritual Assembly as defined herein.
The By-Laws of a National Spiritual Assembly, Article VII, Section III

Within a municipal area, where the people resident in the area pay taxes and vote, the Assembly can be elected, and holds jurisdiction. Anyone living outside of that area is not a member of that Community, and cannot enjoy the administrative privileges of that Community.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 13, 1956

(See also Chapter 15, "Application of Baha'i Law," and/or the booklet "Establishing Boundaries" for further information on matters about which the Local Spiritual Assembly has the authority to legislate)

[2.26] SUGGESTED READINGS

Baha'i Elections, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States/By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, © 1975

Establishing Boundaries booklet, dated July, 1990, prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and available through its Office of Assembly Development

3„ORGANIZATION OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

MEANING OF ORGANIZATION

[3.1] Regarding the relationship of the Cause to the Administration; the Baha'i Faith, as the Guardian himself has repeatedly and emphatically stated, cannot be confined to a mere system of organization, however elaborate in its features and universal in its scope it may be. Organization is only a means to the realization of its aims and ideals, and not an end in itself. To divorce the two, however, would be to mutilate the Cause itself, as they stand inseparably bound to each other, in very much the same relationship existing between the

soul and body in the world of human existence.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 19, 1939, in Lights of Guidance, p. 2

MEETINGS AND MEMBERSHIP

Meetings

The first meeting of a newly-elected Spiritual Assembly shall be called by the member who has received the highest number of votes. This member shall preside until the permanent Chair is chosen. (Please refer to By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article VIII)

Convening the Assembly

If all nine members of the newly-formed Assembly are present at the annual meeting, the election of officers may take place. If not, a separate meeting should be held as soon as possible to allow all those elected to participate.

How Often to Meet

After convening, the Assembly establishes a regular schedule of meetings.

The Spiritual Assembly must decide how often it should meet in order to properly handle the affairs of the Cause under its jurisdiction. Twice a week or twice a month is not the point, the point is that it should be alert and carry on the work adequately.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Directives from the Guardian, p. 7

Quorum

[3.2] Five members of the Spiritual Assembly present at a meeting shall constitute a quorum, and a majority vote of those present and constituting a quorum shall be sufficient for the conduct of business except as otherwise provided in these By-Laws and with due regard to the principle of unity and cordial fellowship involved in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly.
By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article VIII, Sec. 1

We have your letter of July 20, 1967 asking for clarification of Article VIII, Section 1 of the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly which appears on page 19 [p. 26, 1975 ed. Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL] of the Declaration of Trust.

A majority of the members present and constituting a quorum is sufficient to carry a motion. Thus, if only five members of the Assembly are present at a meeting, a majority vote of three is sufficient.

However, Assemblies should take into account the last clause of the first sentence of Section 1 of Article VIII reading as follows:

"...and with due regard to the principle of unity and cordial fellowship involved in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly.

In other words, members of a Spiritual Assembly should not take advantage of a quorum as an expedient to pass a motion which would violate the spirit of the above quoted passage.

As your National Assembly has stated, it is desirable that all nine members of a Local Spiritual Assembly be present at every meeting, and we hope that you will be able to educate members of Assemblies to assume their responsibilities in this regard.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 6, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If the Assembly Is Unable to Get a Quorum
When circumstances arise which prevent an Assembly from achieving a quorum for a length of time, the Assembly may make arrangements to ensure that the affairs of the community continue to be conducted without interruption. This can be done by delegating authority to Assembly members and by specifying the range and limits of their responsibilities. When it resumes meeting, the Assembly would then review and ratify any actions taken by those members.

Emergency Committees
It is entirely appropriate to appoint an emergency committee and to authorize it to take action between National Spiritual Assembly [3.3] meetings. Your Assembly can also authorize such a committee to deal with routine matters in the interim between your Assembly meetings. In both cases full reports of such committee meetings should be made to all members of the Assembly and all decisions arrived at should be confirmed, or otherwise, at the next meeting of the National Assembly.

You may decide on the number of the members of the National Assembly to compose such a committee. However, valid meetings of this committee can take place only when all its appointed members are duly notified.... Finally, you are advised to have regular meetings of your National Assembly and not to allow the arrangement for routine and/or emergency actions to take the place of such meetings.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 15, 1977, in Lights of Guidance, p. 70

It is for your Assembly to define the limits placed upon an emergency committee appointed by you from among your own membership to take action when absolutely necessary on emergencies which arise between meetings. Decisions of the committee of course always are subject to the subsequent approval of the National Assembly as a whole and you should assure yourselves that you are adequately informed of all its actions taken in your name.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 2, 1971, in Lights of Guidance, p. 171

Temporary Administrative Committees
Your Assembly is empowered to name an administrative committee for the...community. Such a committee should be viewed as being a temporary expedient for maintaining the life and vigor of the community until such time as the Local Assembly can be reformed; it is not a replacement for the divine institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly.

With reference to your specific question, the Administrative Committee

for...can be named from among the adult believers of the community, without regard for their election or non-election to the now-lapsed Local Assembly. The single active youth can be called upon by the Committee for whatever duties he may be able to undertake. The Committee can continue the Local Baha'i Fund and also maintain the incorporation of the Local Assembly.

The National Spiritual Assembly has the authority to call for a [3.4]
by-election for a Local Spiritual Assembly in the absence of a quorum of local believers.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 8, 1983,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, as quoted in Lights of Guidance, p. 170, par. 561

As a temporary step in cases where Local Assemblies fail to meet or to elect officers, and are in effect inactive, or in communities with lapsed Assemblies, the National Assembly should consider appointing from among the local believers a small committee which would have administrative and teaching functions. The committee should strive to establish or maintain community life, with the objective of activating the Assembly to the point where it could assume its proper responsibilities. Consultation with the Counselor can be helpful in taking this step.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 9, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Smoking during Assembly Meetings
In answer to such letters the Guardian's secretary replied on his behalf that Baha'is had no right to prevent anyone from smoking; that Baha'is were free to smoke but it was preferable for them not to do so; and that an issue should not be made of this matter. The use of tobacco, in common with other personal practices, should be subject to considerations of courtesy. The Baha'i in his daily life, whether smoker or non-smoker, should always be conscious of the rights of those about him and avoid doing anything which would give offense.

Believers have also raised the question about smoking during Baha'i meetings. It is entirely within the authority of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies to prohibit smoking in meetings held under their auspices. An Assembly may well feel that it does not wish to raise an additional barrier to seekers by prohibiting smoking at public meetings in a society where it is the accepted practice to smoke. On the other hand, it might be wise for the Assembly to caution the Baha'is to restrain their smoking at teaching meetings and firesides in case it is offensive to some seekers. In the case of Nineteen Day Feasts or meetings of Assemblies or committees, it is not right that friends who find smoking offensive should be made to endure it in Baha'i meetings which they are required or expected to attend. If certain individuals feel that they must smoke, then arrangements, such as a break in the meeting, could be made for their convenience. It would, of course, be entirely inappropriate to [3.5]
smoke during the devotional part of a Feast, or at any other devotional gathering.

It is to be hoped that the widespread publicity being given to the evil effects of smoking, both on smokers and on those who have to breathe smoke-laden air, will help to convince everyone of the wisdom ofAbdu'l-Baha in strongly discouraging Baha'is from smoking. However, Baha'is must be careful not to go beyond the Teachings in this matter and try to enforce as a law a matter in which Baha'u'llah has deemed it wise to allow freedom of decision.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 4, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Election of Officers
The officers of the Spiritual Assembly shall consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and such other officers as may be found necessary for the proper conduct of its affairs. The officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the entire membership of the Assembly taken by secret ballot.
By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article VII

We are asked to say it is preferable that a person hold no more than one office, but it is within the discretion of your Assembly to permit a member to hold two offices.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 4, 1984, in Lights of Guidance, p. 28

Discussion of Duties
We have also been asked to point out that although it is the obligation of a Baha'i to serve on an Assembly, either Local or National, when elected, on several occasions the beloved Guardian pointed out that before the election of officers, if any member had a good reason in his own opinion why he should not be elected to one of the offices of the Assembly, he was free to suggest that he should not be so elected. The House of Justice also feels that as the work of the Faith expands and the duties of officers, particularly on National Spiritual Assemblies, acquire more importance, it is permissible and at times advisable to discuss the duties incumbent upon and required of each officer before ballots are cast.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 9, 1987, in Lights of Guidance, pp. 27-28

Electing Officers by Majority Vote
At least five votes are required to elect each officer, regardless of how many Assembly members are present.

[3.6] Organization of the Local Spiritual Assembly
The majority of all nine members of an Assembly, or a majority of all members of a committee, is necessary to elect officers. All members of the Assembly or committee must be given an opportunity to cast their ballots.

However, in case of unavoidable absence, it does not contravene the spirit of the By-Laws if the member casts his ballot by mail or by telephone. All other details in the application of these principles are within the discretion of the Assembly.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 6, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Reporting Inconclusive Ballots
In the election of officers for an Assembly, the complete result of each vote should be known to all members of the Assembly. The names and tally should be given by the tellers, and if no member received the required majority, the members should proceed to vote again. Voting should not be confined to those receiving the highest number of votes.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 28, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Duties of Officers
The Assembly must ensure that all of its responsibilities are carried out satisfactorily by its officers. In a letter of July 30, 1972, the Universal House of Justice states that an Assembly should "hold regular meetings and ensure that all its members are currently informed of the activities of the Assembly, that its Secretary carries out his duties, and its Treasurer holds and disburses the funds of the Faith to its satisfaction, keeping proper accounts and issuing receipts for all contributions.

Chair
Concerning the duties of the Chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly; he is supposed to share, freely and fully, in the discussions of all subjects under the consideration of these bodies, and to register his vote regarding each one of them. The duty of a Baha'i Chairman is not only to guide the course of the discussion, but also to express his own viewpoint without any reservation whatever. He is entitled to exercise both of these functions.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 10, 1936,
in Lights of Guidance, pp. 28-29

In regards to the Assembly meeting, the Chair has the responsibility to:

´ Ensure that there is free and open discussion during the meetings, that it is kept to the point, and that all members are [3.7] given the opportunity to contribute to the consultation
´ Clarify decisions or motions so that they are fully understood and can be accurately recorded in the minutes
´ Call for a vote when appropriate
´ Consult with Secretary about agenda
´ Call the meeting to order

Such systems asRobert's Rules of Order" have no authority in Baha'i consultation. Each Assembly should agree on the details necessary for maintaining an orderly flow of consultation and should revise them as required.

(See also Chapter 9, Section entitledChairing the Feast')

Vice-Chair
The Universal House of Justice has asked us to advise you that the appropriate

procedure would be for the Vice-Chairman of the Assembly to chair the meetings in the absence of the Chairman. If the Vice-Chairman happens to be also absent, then the Assembly should decide who among the members present should chair the meeting.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 10, 1987, in Lights of Guidance, p. 29

A Vice-Chair does not automatically become Chair if the office of Chair becomes vacant. An election must be held and all members of the Assembly are eligible to be elected.

Secretary
Generally, the functions of the Secretary include the following, although the Assembly is free to assign some of the responsibilities to secretarial assistants or other members. Some larger communities have found it is helpful to divide the workload of their Secretariats. For example, they may have a General Secretary, an External Affairs Secretary, a Recording Secretary and a Personal Status Secretary:

´ Prepares agenda for the Assembly meetings, usually in consultation with the Chair
´ Records all minutes of the Assembly meetings and of the annual meeting
´ Receives mail for the Assembly and presents communications of all kinds to the Local Spiritual Assembly at the next meeting
´ Answers correspondence, under the direction of the Local Spiritual Assembly
´ [3.8] Maintains a filing system for all correspondence, community bulletins, and so on
´ Prepares agenda and materials to be shared with or distributed to the community at Nineteen Day Feasts
´ Makes notes of recommendations made at the Nineteen Day Feast and presents them to the Assembly at the next meeting. The community should be advised of any action taken or consideration given to such recommendations.
´ Maintains an up-to-date list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all members of the community
´ Advises the Baha'i National Center of all enrollments, transfers, changes of address, and changes in personal status of the believers (marriage, divorce)
´ Sends out written notices of the Annual Meeting so that they are received at least fifteen days before the annual meeting on April 20th
´ Follows up Assembly action
´ Is watchful for the periodic submission of reports from committees as well as expected responses to the Assembly's communications
´ Brings to the meeting files, correspondence, and references from the Writings which relate to the meeting's agenda

Generally speaking the Secretary of an Assembly must be careful to convey exactly what the majority decision or advice of the body was. There can surely be no objection to his putting it in proper terms and clarifying the matter according to the decisions or instruction of the Assembly. But he should of course not introduce his personal views unless endorsed by the Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, Unfolding Destiny, p. 448

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitledAssembly Communications'; Chapter 2, Section entitledPreparation for the Annual Meeting'; Chapter 6, Section entitledRegister of Vital Statistics'; this Chapter, Section entitledDelegation of Authority')

Assistance for the Secretary
The duties of the Secretary may be divided among more than one person. For example, the Assembly may elect a Recording Secretary to record the minutes and do the filing; to be responsible for recording births, deaths, and marriages; and for communicating with the National Spiritual Assembly about address changes, enrollments, and transfers of membership.

[3.9] Another option is to have a three-member Secretariat including the Chair, the Secretary, and the Recording Secretary, which would assume the many secretarial duties for the Assembly. Each Assembly is free to determine the details of handling this work, the number of officers, and the responsibilities of its officers.

In some communities the work of the Secretary may warrant hiring part-time or full-time staff. In such cases, the Assembly should ensure that the persons hired are trustworthy and able to maintain the Assembly's confidentiality. The Assembly should also familiarize itself with any guidelines for state and federal hiring.

(See also in this Chapter, Appendix C, Section entitled "When to Obtain Additional Coverage;" also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Delegation of Authority")

Treasurer
The National Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility to ensure that contributions received are properly receipted, and satisfactory accounts kept of all receipts and disbursements. While the Treasurer normally is the officer in charge of such a sacred obligation, this does not mean that other members are thereby relieved of all responsibility, or are deprived of their right of access to details related to the current operation of the Assembly, in all its aspects.

Such right and responsibility vested in the individual members of the Assembly do not vitiate the confidentiality of Baha'i contributions, since the information made available to the Treasurer or other members of the Assembly is to be treated in strict confidence.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 11, 1977, in Lights of Guidance, p. 256

It is important for your Assembly, in future, to explain to persons who are entrusted with the money of the Faith that in view of the National Assembly's obligation to protect Baha'i funds, the Assembly will hold them responsible for all moneys they receive, and they should therefore render proper accounts to the National Spiritual Assembly, be faithful custodians of God's trust, and be

assured that such honesty and faithfulness will be richly rewarded from on High.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 18, 1980, in Baha'i Funds and Contributions, p.23

The Treasurer can also have an assistant if the need exists.

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Responsibilities of the Treasurer")

[3.10] Dissatisfaction with Officers
As regards the question of what procedure the Baha'i Assemblies should adopt when dissatisfied with the services of any of their officers, should such dissatisfaction involve the loyalty of an Assembly officer to the Faith, he should, following a majority vote, be dismissed. But in case the dissatisfaction is due to the incompetence of a member, or simply to a neglect on his part to discharge his duties, this does not constitute sufficient justification to force his resignation or dismissal from the Assembly. He should be kept in office until new elections are held.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 50

When an Assembly officer refuses to shoulder the responsibilities of his office and is unwilling to cooperate with his Assembly for the purpose of finding a solution to the problems, or is unable to discharge his/her duties, it will be necessary for the Assembly to make alternate arrangements to have the duties carried out.

Attendance
Importance of Regular Attendance
It is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly the meetings of his local assembly, it would be impossible for him to discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfill his responsibilities, as a representative of the community. Membership in a Local Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, the obligation and capacity to remain in close touch with local Baha'i activities, and ability to attend regularly the sessions of the assembly.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated February 16, 1935, to an individual believer

Membership in a Baha'i Assembly or Committee is a sacred obligation which should be gladly and confidently accepted by every loyal and conscientious member of the Community, no matter how humble and inexperienced. Once elected to serve in a given Assembly a believer's duty is to do his utmost to attend all Assembly meetings, and cooperate with his fellow-members, unless, however, he is prevented from doing so by some major reason such as illness, and even then he should notify the Assembly to this effect.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 79

In the course of reading the Minutes of National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, the members of the Universal House of Justice have noted that in many instances Assembly meetings are attended by less than nine

members. In some few cases Assemblies have difficulty in even maintaining a quorum. The House [3.1] of Justice recognizes that at times a member may have a valid reason for not attending a particular meeting. However, a serious problem arises if absence is due to neglect or lack of appreciation of the sanctity of membership in an institution which is the hub and heart of Baha'i activities in the country.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 26, 1980, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Refusal to Serve
Concerning the question of refusal by certain believers to accept election to an administrative post: The Guardian strongly feels that criticism, opposition, or confusion do not provide sufficient grounds for either refusal or resignation. Only cases of physical or mental incapacity, which, by their very nature, are extremely rare, constitute valid reasons for such an act. The difficulties and tests involved in the acceptance of administrative posts, far from inducing the believers to dissociate themselves from the work of the Cause, should spur them on to greater exertions and to a more active participation in the privileged task of resolving the problems that confront the Baha'i community.... The believers, for the sake of the Cause, now in the period of its infancy, should accept their duties in a spirit of self-sacrifice, and should be animated by the desire to uphold the verdict of the electorate, and to lend their share of assistance, however difficult the circumstances, to the effective administration of the affairs of the Faith.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #152, April 1942, p. 2

While it is true that refusal to serve can ultimately incur the forfeiture of administrative rights, the House of Justice feels that your Assembly should bear in mind the caution voiced on behalf of the Guardian in the letter published on pages 86 and 87 of Principles of Baha'i Administration:Only in cases where individual believers, without any valid reason, deliberately refuse the repeated exhortations, pleas, and warnings addressed to them by their Assemblies, should action be taken in removing them from the voting list." At the present stage...far more beneficial results are likely to be achieved by encouragement of the believers and by their education in the principles and significance of Baha'i administration than by the threat or imposition of sanctions. Indeed the latter, if applied unwisely, could achieve the very opposite of what your Assembly is hoping to accomplish.

Generally the membership of small local communities includes some believers who are new in the Faith and need to be lovingly [3.12] nurtured in the responsibilities of being a Baha'i, and others who are overburdened by a multitude of cares. How often one finds in small Assemblies members who, although devoted believers, have non-Baha'i spouses and families to care for and are very limited in the time they can spend in Baha'i administrative activities. Such believers should be encouraged, and loving appreciation should be shown for whatever services they can render, and nothing should be done, however unintentionally, to make them feel that they are living under a threat

of administrative expulsion if they do not attend every Assembly meeting or decline a request to serve on a committee.

There may, of course, be cases of believers who, without any good reason, refuse to shoulder the responsibilities of membership in the Baha'i community. It is to such extreme cases that you would be justified in applying sanctions if, afterrepeated exhortations, pleas and warnings" they persist in their attitude.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 8, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Prolonged Absence
He [Shoghi Effendi] does not intervene in purely local administrative matters, and it is for the Assembly to decide, if the absence of a member is prolonged, when they should hold an election to replace that person. The principle is that the 9 members of the Spiritual Assembly should be reasonably available for meetings. If their absence from town is prolonged, someone else must fill the vacancy.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 5, 1945, to an individual believer

It is establishing a dangerous precedent to allow Assemblies to put a time limit on non-attendance of their members at meetings of the Spiritual Assembly, beyond which that person is automatically dropped from the Assembly and a vacancy declared.... There should be no time limit fixed by Assemblies beyond which a person is dropped. Every case of prolonged absence from the sessions of the Assembly should be considered separately by that Assembly, and if the person is seen to not want to attend meetings, or to be held away from them indefinitely because of illness or travel, then a vacancy could legitimately be declared and a new member be elected.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #208, June 1948, p. 7

[3.13] As regards electing a temporary member to replace one who is absent the present practice of Baha'i Administration is not in favor of this but prefers to ascertain the duration of the absence of any member who has to be away. Should this period of time be excessive it is within the discretion of the Assembly to recognize a vacancy and call for a by-election. However this should not be lightly decided and the members declared elected at the Convention should remain in office unless there are insuperable difficulties which prevent it.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 10, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Resignation
Personal differences and disagreements among Assembly members surely afford no sufficient ground for such resignation, and certainly cannot justify absence from Assembly meetings. Through the clash of personal opinions, asAbdu'l-Baha has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and divine guidance revealed.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 21

The remedy to Assembly inharmony cannot be in the resignation or abstinence of any of its members. It must learn, in spite of disturbing elements, to continue to function as a whole, otherwise the whole system would become discredited through the introduction of exceptions to the rule.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 21

The National Spiritual Assembly cannot refuse accepting a resignation when it is well justified, and when it is done not with the purpose of shirking responsibility....
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 49

With reference to your question whether it would be permissible for a believer to resign from the Local Assembly; under special circumstances, such as illness, one may do so, but only after, and never before he has been elected to the membership of the Assembly.
Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 21

Can Request Not to Be Appointed Officer
As you know the beloved Guardian highly reprobated resignation from any office to which a believer has been elected and it is certainly best, at this present state of the Cause, for the friends to accept elective service whenever they are called upon to do so. However, there is no objection for an overburdened [3.14] believer asking the Spiritual Assembly to which he may be elected not to appoint him as an officer or to a committee.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 9, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Removal from Assembly Membership
Situations may arise in which a Local Spiritual Assembly member is violating Baha'i law or having such serious problems that his or her membership on the Assembly is detrimental to the reputation of the Faith or disruptive to the functioning of the Assembly. If this occurs, the Local Spiritual Assembly should contact the National Spiritual Assembly, explain the circumstances involved, and include its recommendation for administrative action.

It is also quite permissible for a National Spiritual Assembly to debar an individual believer from serving on a Local Spiritual Assembly without removing his or her voting rights and they may also debar a believer from attending the consultative part of a Nineteen Day Feast. You may also debar a believer from voting in elections without imposing all the other administrative sanctions involved in administrative expulsion.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 31, 1972

(See also Chapter 2, Section entitledBy-Elections;" Chapter 15, Section entitledRemoval of Administrative Rights;" Chapter 15, Section entitledBehavior that Damages the Reputation of the Faith or Causes Disunity')
Guiidelines

DUTIES AND GOALS

Duties of Assembly

A prime element in the careful and wise direction needed is the achievement of victory in the Seven Year Plan [1979-1986], paying great attention to the development and strengthening of Local Assemblies. Great efforts must be made to encourage them to discharge their primary duties of meeting regularly, holding the Nineteen Day Feasts and observing Holy Days, organizing children's classes, encouraging the practice of family prayers, undertaking extension teaching projects, administering the Baha'i Fund and constantly encouraging and leading their communities in all Baha'i activities.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1984

Teaching Accorded Precedence
When in session it behooveth them to converse, on behalf of the servants of God, on matters dealing with the affairs and interests of the public. For instance, teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of [3.15] paramount importance, so that thereby all men may enter the pa-vilion of unity and all the peoples of the earth be regarded even as a single body....
Baha'u'llah, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 11

(See also Chapter 7, Sections entitled "The Local Spiritual Assembly and Teaching" and "Teaching and the Local Community")

Win the Confidence and Affection of Those They Serve
Among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and coor-dinate the affairs of the Cause are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. Theirs is the duty to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments and the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote. Theirs is the duty to purge once and for all their deliberations and the general conduct of their af-fairs from that air of self-contained aloofness, from the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness, in short, from every word and deed that may savor of partiality, self- centeredness and prejudice. Theirs is the duty while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice,...foster the sense of interdependence and co-partner-ship, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all local Assemblies and individual believers on the other.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 143-44

Other Vital Duties
The matter of Teaching, its direction, its ways and means, its extension, its consolidation, essential as they are to the interests of the Cause, constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Baha'u'llah's andAbdu'l-Baha's Tablets will reveal that other du-ties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends of every locality.

Protection
It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.

Unity
They must endeavor to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and [3.16] estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted cooperation for the service of the Cause.

The Less Fortunate
They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of color, caste, and creed.

Education
They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, wherever possible, Baha'i educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development....

Baha'i Magazines
...They must encourage and stimulate by every means at their command, through subscription, reports and articles, the development of the various Baha'i magazines....

Regular Meetings, Anniversaries, Special Gatherings
They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellow-men.

Baha'i Literature
They must supervise in these days when the Cause is still in its infancy all Baha'i publications and translations, and provide in general for a dignified and accurate presentation of all Baha'i literature and its distribution to the general public.

These rank among the most outstanding obligations of the members of every Spiritual Assembly.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 37-39

(See also Chapter 5, Section entitled "Reviewing Baha'i Literature and Materials")

The community, as distinguished from the individual and the insti-tutions, assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. This is necessary development to which much attention is re-quired both with respect to places where large-scale enrollment has occurred and in anticipation of more numerous

instances of entry by troops. A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encour-agers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people of both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, inter-acting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Baha'is everywhere are at [3.17] the very beginning of the process of community building, enor-mous efforts must be devoted to the tasks at hand.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, in The Four Year Plan, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 11

Systematic Planning and Execution
Armed with the strength of action and the cooperation of the individual believers composing it, the community as a whole should endeavor to establish greater stability in the patterns of its development, locally and nationally, through sound, systematic plan-ning and execution of its work and this in striking contrast to the short-lived enthusiasms and frenetic superficialities so characteristic of present-day American life. A Baha'i community which is con-sistent in its fundamental life-giving, life sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Baha'i institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism. May you with renewed determination and a rededication to spiritual values, seize your chance, while there is yet time, to convey the Message of Baha'u'llah thoughtfully, patiently and attractively to your fellow-citizens, whether they be dwellers in the cities or rural areas, whether they be high or low, lettered or unlettered, rich or poor.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The adoption of a local plan by the Local Assembly can exert a far-reaching influence on its work and on the life of the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 24, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Capitalize on the Talents of All Members
The best Assembly is the one that capitalizes the talents of all the members of the group and keeps them busy in some form of active participation in serving the Cause and spreading the Message.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #68, November 1932

The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and As-semblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence [3.18] that exists in the rank and file of its followers. Otherwise the more competent members of the group

will go at a tangent and try to find elsewhere a field of work and where they could use their energy.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated August, 1930, to an individual believer

Delegation of Authority
As a Baha'i community grows, the number and variety of its responsibilities often demand the assistance and expertise of community members not serving on the Assembly. In such cases, the Assembly should delegate specific tasks to committees and individuals who possess the required talents and abilities.

Delegating responsibility also increases the level of participation and helps those involved develop a sense of loyalty and commitment to the Faith and to the Baha'i community. Delegation means assigning responsibilities to committees and individuals, and authorizing them to take the actions required to carry out their responsibilities.

To establish the authority of the committee or individual who has been assigned responsibilities, the Assembly must make certain:

´ that the committee (individual) understands the extent of its own responsibility and authority
´ everyone with whom the committee (individual) is authorized to communicate and collaborate and from whom it may request services also knows that the committee (individual) has such responsibilities and authority.

The committee's authority may be limited in various ways (e.g., by a mandate), but it should always know what constitutes approved and disapproved lines of communication.

There is a common misconception that Assemblies cannot delegate authority because doing so means giving it up. The delegation of authority to a committee (individual) in no way diminishes the Assembly's authority or responsibility. The committee (individual) serves at the wish of the Assembly and can be dissolved at any time if necessary.

Many Assemblies find that some of their activities such as teaching, observance of Feasts and Anniversaries, solution of personal problems, and other duties are best dealt with by committees appointed by the Assembly and responsible to it.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 30, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly, enclosed with a letter dated Naw-Ruz, 1979, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

[3.19] (See also Chapter 4, Section entitledAssign Counseling to Indi-viduals or Committees')

Committees Responsible to Assembly
All local committees are directly and solely responsible to the local Assembly which alone can exercise the power of supervision over them.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 51

Regarding local Baha'i committees; these, though different in their functions enjoy equal rights, and are subject to responsibilities and obligations which, although varying in degree, are equally binding on them all.

These local committees, being appointed by the Local Spiritual Assembly itself, are responsible to that body alone, and they can be dissolved, and their membership altered by it at any time. The local committees are the hands of the Spiritual Assembly that has appointed them..., and as such are subject to its rulings.

The Local Spiritual Assembly cannot delegate to any one of the local committees the authority to exercise any control or supervision over any other committee or body which it has itself appointed. All local committees are directly and solely responsible to the Local Assembly which alone can exercise the power of supervision over them.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 16, 1939

Service of Children and Youth
The question of young Baha'is being permitted to serve on com-mittees other than the Youth Committee has been raised in a number of letters recently, and in considering the matter he felt that Baha'i young people under twenty-one should not be denied the privilege of committee work. Though they cannot be voting members of Baha'i communities (or exercise the electoral vote at all until they reach that age), and though they cannot, likewise, be elected to Assemblies, there is no reason why they should not serve the Cause on various committees as all committees, national or local, are subordinate to Assemblies and their members not elected but appointed, and appointed by Assemblies. We have many devoted and talented young believers who can be of great assistance to the Cause even though not yet legally of age.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #174, April/May 1945, p.1

[3.20] It is within a Spiritual Assembly's discretion to request Baha'i chil-dren to undertake work of which they are capable in service to the Faith, such as service on suitable committees.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 19, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Both children of Baha'i parents, and children who, with their parents" consent, declare their faith in Baha'u'llah before they are fifteen years old, are regarded as Baha'is and it is within a Spiritual Assembly's discretion to request such children to undertake work of which they are capable in the service of the Faith, such as service on suitable committees.
Letter form the Universal House of Justice, dated December, 1975, in Handbook for Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia, 1980 version, p. 24

Terms of Appointment
Although National Assemblies and Local Assemblies may provide for continuity of Committee personnel by re-appointment of members each year, Assemblies should not appoint members of Committees for a term of more than one year.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated December 20, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

'As regards the appointment of committees on a yearly basis, we refer to the Guardian's instructions on page 141 of Baha'i Administration that...the renewal, the membership, and functions...should be reconsidered separately each year by the incoming National Assembly...." Individuals appointed to committees should identify themselves with functions and objectives which normally extend beyond the term of their appointment. Just as mem-bers of the National Assembly relate themselves to goals of the Nine Year Plan, members of Local Assemblies and committees should do likewise, so that a single dynamic spirit may animate the important work for which each Assembly or committee is responsible.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 23, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Election of Officers
He feels that committees must assume more responsibility and exercise freedom of choice and judgment in electing their officers, and function as a corporate body with a corporate spirit.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 27, 1947,
quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 12, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Administrative Committees for Sub-Units of a City
The Local Spiritual Assembly could be authorized to appoint an administrative committee in each of a number of sub-units of the [3.21] city; and these committees could deal with the urgent needs of the friends in these areas on behalf of the Assembly.... In such a decentralized system, the Local Spiritual Assembly would have to provide for the overall coordination of the efforts of the friends in all sub-units of the city.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 20, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Intercommunity Committees
The purpose of intercommunity activities is to combine the resources of two or more communities to advance the teaching work, further consolidation, or stimulate fellowship and take advantage of pooled resources.

The Local Spiritual Assembly that sponsors an intercommunity project or activity may retain complete authority for planning and responsibility by mutual agreement of the participating communities. The sponsoring Assembly may appoint a committee and invite other Local Spiritual Assemblies or groups to designate members to represent them on the committee. The committee, which is directed by and is responsible to the sponsoring Local Spiritual Assembly, then plans and executes the intercommunity activity according to the approved and delegated limits of authority. Two or more adjacent Local Spiritual Assemblies may agree to alternate or rotate responsibility for sponsorship of a continuing effort. Funds should be held and disbursed by the sponsoring body through its elected Treasurer, and an accounting must be made to the cooperating Assemblies.

Baha'is planning intercommunity events (including fund-raisers) in areas where Assemblies exist must first obtain the permission of the Assembly if the activity is to take place in that community. For insurance purposes and to ensure accountability of the funds, it is preferable that events be sponsored by an Assembly.

Using Non-Baha'i Experts/Agencies
He sees no objection to using the advice and services of non-Baha'i experts, or agencies, as long as the purity of the Teachings and the dignity of the Faith are maintained.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 60

Public Information Representatives and Committees
The Baha'i Public Information Network consists of public information representatives and the members of public information committees. The Network is a means by which the Baha'i community can provide news and information about the Faith and its principles and about major developments affecting the Baha'i world. A public information representative should be appointed by the Local Spiritual Assembly every year.

3.22 (See also in this Chapter, Appendix A, "Public Information Representatives and Committees"; Chapter 12, Section entitled "Relationship with the Media")

ASSEMBLY COMMUNICATIONS

Record-Keeping
Records
The records of an Assembly include such items as the agenda, minutes, committee reports, correspondence, membership statistics, financial records, incorporation papers, and any other type of document which enables the Assembly to maintain accurate information and a history of its own actions and its community's status and activities. If a computer was used, a hard copy and disk should be maintained. Back-up computer files should be regularly maintained.

For long-term preservation, permanent paper, such as all-rag bond, and non-water soluble ink should be used for the minutes and all other important correspondence from the Assembly.

All Assembly materials, such as copies of minutes, correspondence, files, and so on must be retrieved from any person leaving Assembly membership. If such materials are not returned voluntarily by the person, the Assembly should take action to recover them or see that they are destroyed.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Archives")

Access to the Records
In reply to your letter of May 13th, 1976, the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that all members of the Spiritual Assembly are equal and should have access to the files and minutes of the Assembly of which they are members. It is, however, within the discretion of any Spiritual Assembly to so

organize its files and records that certain items could be listed asconfidential" and access to those so classified could only be had by a specific decision of the Assembly itself.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 8, 1976

The Universal House of Justice has made suggestions about the preparation of an agenda for National Secretaries which may also be applicable to Local Assemblies:

Agenda
The Agenda is usually prepared by the Secretary, sometimes in consultation with the Chairman or other member or members of the National Spiritual Assembly. Immediately after a Spiritual As-sembly meeting, all items not cleared should be transferred to a new draft Agenda in preparation for the next meeting. Then, as each new matter arises, it should be entered under the appropriate heading. In this way the Agenda can be built up gradually. A few [3.23] days before the Assembly meeting, the completed draft could be duplicated for the members. At the beginning of each meeting, any additional urgent items which have developed or items which indi-vidual members wish to raise can be added.
The Universal House of Justice, in "A Suggested Guide for National Secretaries'"
enclosed with a letter dated May 4, 1972

The agenda should be reviewed and agreed upon by the entire Assembly at the beginning of each meeting, at which time additions and deletions can be made. The Assembly should agree upon which items of business have priority.

Reports
In keeping with the reporting procedure established by the Local Spiritual Assembly, the Secretary should watch for periodic reports from local committees as well as expected responses to Assembly communications. The reports indicate whether the committees are functioning, how well their activities are progressing, and what guidance they need from the Assembly. If reports are not forthcoming or meetings are not being held, the Secretary should report the matter to the Local Assembly for appropriate action.

Minutes
The nature of Assembly minutes is a matter for the body itself to decide. Naturally all important subjects brought up and notes must be recorded, but how detailed the record must be is for the members themselves to decide.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Unfolding Destiny, p. 448

The Universal House of Justice has offered suggestions to National Spiritual Assemblies about recording their minutes:

A. Background information should be brief, but in sufficient detail so that anyone reading the Minutes will understand the decision which follows.

The full discussion, extraneous details regarding motions, and the names of individuals making the motions should not be recorded. Names are included, however, when recording reports given on special assignments or situations.

In every case the background to a decision should be recorded in the Minutes next to the decision itself.

There may be cases where the decision is self-explanatory and no background information is required.

B. Some Assemblies distinguish the vote by making it a separate indented paragraph and some Assemblies capitalize the [3.24] decision when Minutes are typed, so there is no question as to which is background information and which is the vote of the Assembly. Another way of identifying actions of the Assembly is to number each decision of the Assembly, and this is sometimes done on a continuing basis throughout the year.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 4, 1972

Approval of Minutes
The minutes of each meeting must be reviewed and, if necessary, corrected at a subsequent meeting of the Assembly. The decision of the Assembly to approve the minutes and any necessary corrections must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting where the action is taken.

Confidential Matters May Be Recorded Separately
As a general rule, all matters acted upon by an Assembly are recorded in its minutes. The Assembly may, however, record highly confidential items separately, but it should be noted in the minutes that confidential items have been separately recorded. Thus, if for any reason the Assembly is requested to supply information concerning such items and it feels that it would be preferable for the matter not to be divulged, it can express its views before acceding to the request.

...The decision about what matters should be treated confidentially is made by the Assembly, which also has the duty to respect requests from individuals who express the wish that certain matters be handled on a confidential basis.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 2, 1987, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Privileged Communications")

Correspondence
Communications to and from the Assembly may be classified generally as incoming and outgoing correspondence. Copies of letters and memoranda should be filed, as should records of phone calls and personal communications.

Incoming Correspondence
The Secretary usually receives and opens all incoming correspondence, which is then shared with the Assembly at its next meeting, unless the Assembly has instructed that it be routed elsewhere (for example, to a committee).

Spoken communications should also be reported to the Assembly.

Once a letter or message has been reported, recorded in the minutes, and read, it should be kept in the Assembly's files for future [3.25] reference. However, bulletins, fliers, and announcements can be discarded when they cease to be

current.

Feast Recommendations and Communications

Recommendations and suggestions from the friends at the Feast are treated as incoming correspondence. The Secretary or Assistant Secretary should make accurate and thorough notes at Feast so that the suggestions and recommendations of the believers can be discussed by the Assembly. Feast recommendations are to be recorded in the minutes of the Assembly Meeting, as are the decisions the Assembly makes about them. Also, the Assembly must be sure to inform the community about its decisions on the recommendations„at a subsequent Feast, in its bulletin, or by some other appropriate manner.

Among the correspondence the Assembly receives are letters and announcements to be shared with the friends at the Feast. The Assembly instructs the Secretary about what correspondence it wishes to share and whether the entire letter or just portions of the letter should be read. (All correspondence need not be read at the Feast. Instead, highlights of the letter can be read, or the correspondence can be shared through newsletters or placed on bulletin boards for review by the friends.)

Outgoing Correspondence

Form

The advantage of written communication is its permanence; the advantage of spoken communication is its convenience. If an Assembly has something important to convey, writing it increases the likelihood that it will be understood. It is best to put most communications in writing (preferably typewritten). When an Assembly conveys messages orally, it is wise to follow the conversation with a letter to ensure that both parties understand what was discussed.

When communications are conveyed through the Assembly's representative, either written or oral communication is equally official.

Assemblies should make copies of outgoing correspondence and retain them in the Assembly's files.

Letterhead

The letterhead of the Assembly's stationery should readSpiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of..." (omit the wordLocal'). The design of the letterhead should be simple and dignified. The National Spiritual Assembly discourages the addition of photographs, artwork and quotations from the Writings.

Clarity, Tone, and Accuracy

The Assembly should strive for accuracy, clarity, and overall excellence in its communications. If the Secretary does not fully understand the Assembly's intent, a draft of the letter should be brought to the Assembly for approval.

While communications vary in tone, they should always be patient, courteous and loving. Even when reprimanding a believer, the Assembly should do it in a manner which helps and even encourages [3.26] the person, while still expressing the authority of the Assembly.

We are deeply concerned that some of the letters written on behalf of your National Assembly contain brusque language, are critical in tone, lack warmth, and reflect impatience with friends whose actions have brought problems to your council chamber.

We fully understand how the burdensome weight of these vexatious problems, many of which could and should have been avoided, can tax the patience of the most serene. The temptation to react sharply and defensively is very great, yet we know that, as Trustees of the Merciful, we should not do so. Not only is it contrary to the spirit of the instructions of the Master and the Guardian, with which you are thoroughly familiar, but giving vent to such reaction tends to evoke resentment rather than bringing about the desired result....

...We mention these examples only to call to your notice a reaction which may not have been apparent to those writing letters on your behalf, in the hope that ways and means can be found to insure that the manner in which you convey your views or decisions to the friends will promote the utmost unity, concord and understanding.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 25, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Conveying the Message
Once the Assembly has stated clearly the contents of the message, chosen its form, and determined its tone, it must delegate the responsibility for sending it. Usually the Secretary of the Assembly communicates messages on the Assembly's behalf and is recognized by the community as the Assembly's spokesperson. In some cases the Assembly may wish to delegate this responsibility to another Assembly member or believer who then functions as the Assembly's representative.

Review
The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for all communications which come from its Secretary and its committees. Therefore, it should establish a procedure for reviewing communications. It may, for example, authorize a subcommittee of the Assembly to write or review certain letters for the Assembly and all the correspondence of the committees. Although the Assembly has the right to see all communications before they are sent, this is usually impractical and unnecessary. If the Assembly finds that its messages are often misunderstood, it should examine them more carefully to determine the source of the problem.

[3.27] (See also Chapter 5, Section entitled "Reviewing Baha'i Literature and Materials")

Privileged Communications
The laws of a majority of states provide that certain confidential communications made between a member of a religious faith and the clergyman of that faith are privileged. Privileged means that the religious leader receiving the communication cannot be compelled to testify as to the content of the communication in a legal proceeding without the permission of the person who

communicated the statements. In states where this privilege is recognized, the members of Local Spiritual Assemblies would be included within the definition of the term "clergyman," as that term is used in the statute.

It is important to note that not all communications by Baha'is to their Spiritual Assemblies are considered privileged and, furthermore, not all confidential statements are accorded the status of privileged communications. The specific requirements for achieving this status will vary according to the statutes of each state, but in general, a majority of states require that the statements must comprise the following elements to qualify as privileged:

´ The statement must have been made to a "clergyman" (Local Spiritual Assembly) acting in an official capacity.
´ The statement must have been made in the course of "discipline enjoined" by the religious faith, i.e., it must be made pursuant to a requirement of the writings, customs, and practices of that religious faith.
´ The statement must have been intended to be confidential in nature and, thus, not intended to be repeated to others outside of the Local Spiritual Assembly.
´ Many courts also require that the statement be penitential in character, but since the Baha'i writings admonish against confessing one's sins to another, in states where this requirement exists, the Baha'is asserting the privilege would have to argue through their attorneys for an exemption from this requirement.

In general, the Local Spiritual Assembly should be careful to remind the friends who come before it seeking advice and spiritual counsel that the Assembly considers all communications made before it in the course of such matters to be privileged and should ask the Baha'is to expressly agree not to compel the Assembly to testify to such statements in any legal proceeding. Following this practice will foster an atmosphere of trust and openness which is both conducive and necessary to full and frank consultation leading to a resolution of the problem.

[3.28] Regarding the subject of privilege attached to documents, minutes, books, and records, again, the specific requirements of state law would have to be applied to each individual situation to determine whether such materials would fall within the requirements of the privilege.

The most conceivable way in which a question of privileged communications will arise is when a member of an Assembly, usually the Secretary, is served either by mail or in person with a subpoena. A subpoena is a court order summoning a witness to appear at a certain place and time and give testimony on any information he may have about a certain matter. The subpoena may also order the witness to bring any documents, books, and records related to the matter in question. If an Assembly member receives such a subpoena, they should immediately contact the National Spiritual Assembly for further guidance. While it will be necessary to comply with the subpoena, the Assembly will, in all likelihood, be advised to seek representation of an attorney to file a motion to quash (void) the subpoena. It is most important to contact the National

Spiritual Assembly immediately upon being served because a subpoena requires an answer within a specific number of days. Failure to comply with a subpoena constitutes a violation of a court order and can carry sanctions.

It should also be pointed out that if an Assembly member divulges confidential information to another or seeks to testify about statements received in an official capacity without the permission of the person making those statements, that Assembly member may be held legally responsible to the person who made the statements for any injury caused by such breach of confidentiality.

Confidentiality and the Civil Law
Since, at the present time, Baha'i institutions are not authorized to deal with criminal matters,„as the State claims an exclusive interest and has clearly laid down procedures to be followed,„such matters must be referred to the civil authorities. The advice of legal experts should be sought in reconciling the observance of confidentiality and the Assembly's obligation to uphold government regulations in criminal cases.

(See also Chapter 4, Section entitledConfidentiality'; Chapter 15, Section entitledCriminal Offenses, Disobedience to Civil Laws'; Chapter 17, Section entitledIn Case of Suspected Child Abuse or Domestic Violence')

Archives
The institution of the Haziratu'l-Quds...whether local or national, will as its component parts, such as...the Archives, the Library...are brought together and made jointly to operate in one [3.29] spot, be increasingly regarded as the focus of all Baha'i administrative activity, and symbolize, in a befitting manner, the ideal of service animating the Baha'i community in its relation alike to the Faith and to mankind in general.
Shoghi Effendi, in God Passes By, pp. 339-340

The importance of the institution of Baha'i Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is especially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Baha'i historians of the future. The institution of Baha'i Archives is indeed a most valuable storehouse of information regarding all aspects of the Faith, administrative as well as doctrinal.

...Future generations of believers will be surely in a better position than we are to truly and adequately appreciate the many advantages and facilities which the institution of the Archives offers to individual believers and also to the community at large.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #104, December 1936, p.1

The purpose of the Baha'i Archives is to ensure that all non-current records and papers of permanent administrative, historical, doctrinal, or sacred value are preserved and made available for research to historians and to the administrative institutions of the Faith.

The purpose of the Baha'i Library is to serve the need of both the Spiritual

Assembly and local Baha'i community for access to the Sacred Writings and other library material.

Maintaining the Archives

The Archives of a local Spiritual Assembly consist of the official, non-current records of the Spiritual Assembly, its officers, and committees. Incorporated Spiritual Assemblies must be especially careful to preserve both original articles of incorporation and minutes of the Annual Meeting. The Spiritual Assembly will need to adopt policies regulating access to its records in the Archives to ensure that the information is accessible while protecting confidential records. In addition, the Archives may include such things as relics, personal papers of believers, community newsletters, photographs, and audio-visual material. If personal papers contain books and periodicals these can be transferred to the Library. Every community should keep a file which records the history of the Faith in the locality and should consider taping the recollections of the older Baha'is. (More information about the local Baha'i Archives can be obtained from the National Baha'i Archives.)

Retention of the Records

Non-current Assembly records transferred to the Archives will need to be appraised by the local archivist or archives committee to determine which records should be kept permanently. Records [3.30] not having permanent value can be disposed of, although there may be audit or legal reasons to keep some financial or legal records for a few more years. See appendix B for a list of Assembly records and their disposition.

Maintaining the Library

The Library of a Local Spiritual Assembly serves the needs of both the Spiritual Assembly and local Baha'i community. Besides a collection of the authoritative texts of the Faith, the Library will have collections of introductory and specialized Baha'i topics, general reference works, books on other religions and subjects concerning the problems of present day society. There can be both lending and reference/rare book sections in the Library, with reference and rare books not circulating. Often personal Baha'i Libraries that accompany donations of personal papers to the Archives can be used to augment the Library. A librarian or Library committee should be appointed to be in charge of the Library.

Local Publications

While most Baha'i literature is published by the National Spiritual Assembly, Local Assemblies and individuals also can publish materials for use on the local level. Material which relates directly to the work of the Faith in a particular locality or which suits specific local needs is appropriate for local publication. Such materials can be distributed only within the area of jurisdiction of the Local Assembly. All such publications must be reviewed by the Local Spiritual Assembly.

(See also Chapter 5, Section entitledReview of Baha'i Literature and Materials')

Bulletins and Newsletters

Many Local Spiritual Assemblies publish bulletins or newsletters. Circulating a local Baha'i bulletin is an effective way of communicating with the friends, and of inspiring their interest in Baha'i activities. Moreover, the bulletin carries news of the development of the Cause in the community.

The doors of communication between the friends, the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly should always be open. The one means which will contribute most to the promotion of this open-door policy is the regular issue of an interesting and heartwarming newsletter. In certain countries, we are glad to see, there are in addition to the national newsletter, news bulletins issued on regional or district levels. The importance of these secondary organs of Baha'i communication acquires added weight in areas where differences of language make the issue of [3.31] bulletins in a local language of each area highly desirable, if not essential.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 25, 1975, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

While fully conscious of the importance of such Baha'i local organs in bringing more unity and cooperation among individual believers and groups, Shoghi Effendi feels that great care should be taken lest local activities of this nature tend to develop to an extent that would jeopardize the national activities of the Faith. Just as the local Baha'i Fund must under all circumstances be subor-dinated to the national fund, so also every local circular letter should be considered as subsidiary to the national report of Baha'i activities in every country. Such a coordination between local and na-tional efforts is indispensable, not only because of its economic advantages, but essentially due to the fact that upon the application of the principle underlying this process must inevitably depend the effective working of the entire administrative machinery of the Faith.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated February 20, 1934, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

Concerning local Baha'i newsletters the Guardian strongly feels that they should be primarily devoted to the spread of local news and activities, and should under no circumstances contain any statement implying criticism of or even interference with the policy of the National Spiritual Assembly. They may occasionally refer to items of a national scope, but this should be done only with the view of assisting and not hindering the national body of the Cause to carry out effectively its program and decisions. There is thus a definite line of demarcation between correspondence initiated by local and national assemblies.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 10, 1934, to an individual believer

Promotion of Private Businesses

In general, the National Spiritual Assembly has discouraged the friends from placing advertisements in official Baha'i publications for products and services which will bring them personal gain.

LEGAL BASIS

Incorporation

It is surely very important to give the Local Spiritual Assemblies some legal standing, for as the Cause progresses and its adherents increase, they will be confronted with duties they cannot even imagine at present. Not only will they have to make contracts for acquiring halls for their meeting place, but also they will be obliged [3.32] to create new institutions to care for their sick, poor, and aged people. We hope that before long the Baha'is will even afford to have schools that would provide the children the intellectual and spiritual education as prescribed in the Writings of Baha'u'llah and the Master.

For such duties that will naturally devolve upon the Local Spiri-tual Assemblies there will be an increasing need for a legal standing. They will have to be considered as a legal person with the power of making binding contracts.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 48

Note: The legal standing available to a Local Spiritual Assembly is incorporation.

Steps of Incorporation

In order to incorporate, the Local Spiritual Assembly should write to the National Spiritual Assembly for instructions. The Local Spiritual Assembly should then hire an attorney. After the legal documents (and the name and address of the attorney) have been submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly and approved, they can be filed with the appropriate state agency. A copy of the final documents,„with the official indication (seal or stamp) that they were filed by the state,„should be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly for its records.

When a Local Spiritual Assembly becomes incorporated, a legal entity comes into being that has a legal existence apart from the individual members of the Assembly.

This legal entity can hold property and enter into contracts.

When the corporation incurs a legal debt, the corporation becomes the liable party, rather than the Assembly members.

If the proper legal steps are taken, the Assembly members would be insulated from personal liability.

Incorporation limits the legal liability for the obligation to the assets of the corporation.

It is crucial that each Assembly incorporation is done correctly and that their status as a corporation is clearly communicated in all communications.

It is important to include in all agreements that the Assembly is a corporation and the state of the Assembly's corporation.

If the Assembly has adopted the word "incorporated" or "inc." in its legal

name, then it is very important to use that word on its stationary letterhead and in all agreements that it enters into.

Failure to do so may remove from the members of the Assembly the protection which the incorporation might have afforded.

Also important in insulating the individual Assembly members from liability is the manner of signing the document.

It is essential that the person signing for the Assembly indicate at the signature line that they are signing in a representative capacity, not as individuals.

The following are two acceptable ways for Jane Doe to sign which will indicate her representative capacity.

[3.33] 1:
Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Anytown, a(n) (name of state) corporation

(signature)
By Jane Doe, Secretary

2:
(signature)
Jane Doe, Secretary
for the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Anytown, a(n) (name of state) corporation

It is also important to note that sometimes, people dealing with a corporation, well aware of these legal principles, will not agree to limit the legal liability to that of the corporation and will want a personal guarantee as well. It is common practice to require a second signature line for individual signers. By signing the document the individual is agreeing to be the bound by the terms of the agreement and is now personally responsible for its obligations. This is what is known as being a guarantor. Once individual members become guarantors, they can be held responsible along with the Assembly for the terms of the agreement. Given the importance of incorporation and the many complicated issues involved, it is important that Assemblies consult with an attorney to make sure that incorporation is done correctly and that the Assembly is following the proper procedures to maintain the protection of the corporation. Issues related to this are not limited to those touched upon here.

Maintaining Incorporation
The Assembly should also consult an attorney to find out if the state requires any annual reports or other regular filings to maintain it incorporated status. It is also necessary to apply for a new Federal Identification Number from the Social Security Administration using a Form SS4. In order to do so, it is important to indicate that the Assembly is part of a group exemption and to indicate in the appropriate space on the form that the Group Exempt Number is 9508. Please contact the Office of the Treasurer and Development for a sample of a properly completed Form SS4.

Some states require incorporated Assemblies to file tax returns even though they have a tax-exempt status; failure to file can jeopardize the standing of the incorporation.

[3.34] Status of Incorporation if Assembly Cannot Re-Form

The incorporated status of a Local Spiritual Assembly is not necessarily lost if it is unable to reform. The corporation created has a legal existence apart from the actual Local Spiritual Assembly that it represents. It can continue to exist even if the Assembly itself is lost, as long as the legal requirements for maintaining corporate status continue to be met, including filing the annual report with the Secretary of State in the state of incorporation.

Insurance

The National Spiritual Assembly's General Liability Insurance Coverage

Since Local Spiritual Assemblies may be held responsible for accidents that occur at Assembly-sponsored activities, the National Spiritual Assembly has found it prudent to protect itself and the Local Spiritual Assemblies and their members against claims by purchasing insurance coverage.

This insurance includes casualty coverage for property it owns; public liability coverage for claims made against it arising out of activities conducted or sponsored by the National Assembly (or its agencies) on property it either owns, rents, leases, or uses; and Workers" Compensation coverage for its employees. The National Spiritual Assembly's insurance policies are administered by the Office of the Treasurer.

Who Is Covered?

Within its liability coverage, the National Spiritual Assembly includes as "named insureds" all Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States.

Coverage is furnished to Local Spiritual Assemblies for two reasons:

´ Since liability insurance is generally written in conjunction with property casualty insurance, Assemblies not owning or leasing property may be unable to acquire any liability coverage. This would expose the individual Assembly members to liability.

´ Even if liability coverage were available, the cost would, in all likelihood, be prohibitively expensive for most Assemblies.

Therefore, the National Spiritual Assembly has decided to include the Local Spiritual Assemblies within its policy. To help defray the additional cost, it asks every Local Assembly to pay a modest amount each year to the Baha'i Services Fund. The coverage is provided, however, whether or not an Assembly makes the requested payment.

(See also in this Chapter, Appendix C,The National Spiritual Assembly's General Liability Insurance Coverage')

[3.35] SUGGESTED READINGS

Baha'i Administration, Shoghi Effendi

The Local Spiritual Assembly, Compiled by the Universal House of Justice

The National Spiritual Assembly, Compiled by the Universal House of Justice, 1975

Guidelines for Baha'i Archives, available from the National Spiritual Assembly (Archives)

Principles of Baha'i Administration: A Compilation, by the Na-tional Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, 1976

Steps to be Taken for Incorporating a Local Spiritual Assembly, available from the National Spiritual Assembly (Office of the Secretary)

APPENDIX A
PUBLIC INFORMATION REPRESENTATIVES AND COMMITTEES

BAHA'I PUBLIC INFORMATION NETWORK

[3.36] The Baha'i Public Information Network consists of the Public Information Representatives and the members of public information committees. The Network is a means by which the Baha'i community can provide news and information about the Baha'i Faith and its principles and about major developments affecting the Baha'i world. Activities of Public Information Representatives and committees involve the establishment of ongoing relationships with local communications media. Public information is distinct from the proclamation of the Faith through the media.

(See also Chapter 7, Section entitled "Proclamation")

ANNUAL APPOINTMENT
A Public Information Representative should be appointed or re-appointed every year. Local Spiritual Assemblies and groups should notify the National Spiritual Assembly's Office of Public Information of the appointment as soon as possible to ensure that communication is maintained between the National Spiritual Assembly and the local Baha'i community.

An isolated believer may be registered as a Public Information Representative if he or she is sponsored by a Local Spiritual Assembly.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION REPRESENTATIVE
The Public Information Representative is the spokesperson for the local Baha'i community. The representative should concentrate on building ongoing relationships with all local communications media. The goal of such effort is to define the public image of the Faith.

The National Spiritual Assembly sends news and information about the Faith to Public Information Representatives and committees. The Public Information Representative should provide this information to his or her sponsoring Assembly as soon as possible. The Public Information Representative is also responsible for distributing appropriate material to local media and to the local Baha'i community. The representatives must be well-informed about the current developments of the Faith.

(See also Chapter 12, Section entitled "Contacting National Media")

[3.37] QUALIFICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

When a Local Spiritual Assembly or group considers whom to appoint as its Public Information Representative or as a member of a Public Information committee, it should select a person whose public relations skills combine the ability to approach communications media and to provide knowledge and accurate information about the Faith to the public.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

If a Public Information Representative or committee needs help determining how to approach the media, needs additional information, or needs clarification of public statements about the Faith, the person or committee should contact (Office of Public Information). Whenever a reference to the Faith appears in a local newspaper, the Public Information Representative should send two originals of the page to the Office of Public Information as soon as possible.

(See also Chapter 12, "External Affairs")

APPENDIX B

[3.38] GUIDELINES FOR THE DISPOSITION OF A SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY'S RECORDS

Disposition of Non-Current Records	Permanant Retention in Archives	Destroy
Annual reports	X	
Minutes	X	
Correspondence		
Feast letters	X	
Other routine mailings from Baha'i National Center	X	
Unique correspondence with the National Spiritual Assembly, the Baha'i National Center, or other Baha'i institutions	X	
Correspondence with individuals	X	
Routine advertisements, and so on, from non-Baha'is	X	
Birth, marriage, and death registers	X	
Cash journal	X	
Annual financial reports	X	
Other financial records	X	

(Some of these records should be kept for five years. See "Stewardship and Development: a Desktop Reference for Spiritual Assemblies and Treasurers" for recommended retention schedule.)

Local committee reports Local bulletins, newsletters, and calendars	
Publicity files and scrapbooks	X
Personal status case files	X
Membership lists and directories	X
Enrollment, change of address forms, etc.	X
Duplicate annual reports, minutes, bulletins, etc.	X
Photographs of the Spiritual Assembly, Baha'i community, and community activities	X

APPENDIX C

[3.39] THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY'S GENERAL LIABILITY INSURANCE COVERAGE

SCOPE OF COVERAGE

Public Liability

The insurance carrier will pay amounts on behalf of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies which they may be required to pay as damages arising out of certain activities of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies which cause bodily injury to another or damage to property of another. There are, of course, limits on the amount of damages payable and there are certain activities which are excluded.

Thus, if a claim arises out of an excluded activity, the Local Spiritual Assembly could be liable for any such damages. It is essential, then, that the Local Spiritual Assembly be aware of these exclusions. Separate coverage should either be obtained by the Local Assembly for an excluded activity or the Assembly should decide not to sponsor the activity.

Limits of Public Liability

At the time of this printing, the following limits apply to the coverage:

- $2,000,000 general aggregate
- $1,000,000 products and completed operations
- $1,000,000 personal and advertising injury
- $1,000,000 each occurrence
- $50,000 fire damage to premises of others
- $5,000 medical expenses

The following activities are excluded under the National Spiritual Assembly's policy:

Exclusions

1. Intentional bodily injury or property damage. The policy is NOT an all-risk policy that covers any injury which occurs at an Assembly-sponsored event. In many cases the injury will not result from the Assembly's irresponsibility; responsibility may lie with the injured person.

Since many people are covered by private health insurance or Medicare, they will probably look to their own insurance to satisfy their medical expenses. For those without insurance, the [3.40] policy may cover medical expenses up to $5,000 without the need to establish fault on the part of the Assembly.

Medical expenses of the following persons are not covered:

´ Someone hired to do work by the local Assembly or a tenant of the Assembly
´ Someone to whom benefits are payable under a Workers" Compensation or disability benefits law
´ Someone injured while practicing for or participating in an athletic or sports contest or exhibition

2. Liability for injury or damage assumed under any contract or agreement except for certain contracts such as those for lease of premises.

3. Damage to premises leased under a contract that is occupied by a Local Spiritual Assembly including premises the Assembly rents, leases, or borrows, subject to policy conditions.

4. Damages to buildings the Assembly owns, leases, rents, or uses. Thus, if the Assembly acquires its own building, it will need to obtain its own casualty insurance.

5. Damage to personal property in the Assembly's care, custody, or control. Thus, if the Assembly has furniture or equipment in a rented office, it may want to buy a separate policy to cover that property, if coverage is desired.

6. Property damage, bodily injury, and medical expenses resulting from ownership, use, operation or maintenance of an automobile, aircraft, or watercraft, including loading, un-loading, and entrustment to others of an automobile, aircraft, or watercraft. Thus, if an Assembly acquires an automobile, it should purchase auto insurance coverage.

7. Personal injury resulting from written or spoken material made public by the Assembly, if that material is known by the Assembly to be false, slanderous, or defamatory.

8. Personal injury damages that may result from wrongful eviction, false arrest, or invasion of privacy.

WHEN TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL COVERAGE

A Local Spiritual Assembly should obtain its own insurance coverage, in addition to the coverage provided by the National Assembly, under the following circumstances:

1. [3.41] When real estate including a structure is acquired, a property policy should be obtained, particularly if the property is financed with borrowed funds. Public liability coverage should be included with the property policy.

2. When space is rented or leased from another, a tenant's policy should be obtained to cover the Assembly's contents, and public liability coverage should be included in the policy.

3. When an automobile is acquired, an auto policy should be purchased. In some states, such coverage is mandatory. Special licenses may also be required for drivers of a shuttle bus or passenger van.

4. When an employee is hired, Workers" Compensation insurance will need to be obtained. Some states also require a statutory form of disability insurance. A caretaker of a local center may also be considered an employee, thus requiring coverage. Disability and health insurance is not a substitute for Workers" Compensation coverage.

5. When real estate without a structure is acquired, public liability coverage should be obtained if possible. The Assembly should also notify the Office of the Treasurer of the location and description of the property.

6. When hiring outside contractors to perform construction or maintenance services on Assembly property, additional coverage may be required if the contractors do not carry adequate coverage. To be sure an outside contractor has proper liability and Workers" Compensation coverage, the Assembly must insist upon receiving a "certificate of insurance" evidencing the contractor's coverage. The certificate should name the Assembly as an "additional insured." It is recommended that the Assembly consult its insurance agent for more information concerning the adequate levels of coverage required when hiring outside contractors.

(See also in this Chapter, Appendix C, Section entitledCertifi-cates of Insurance from Vendors, Contractors, Etc.')

ACCIDENTS AND CLAIMS

In the event of an accident for which the Assembly needs to file a claim with the National Spiritual Assembly's insurance carrier, it should do as follows:

1. [3.42] A written report should be submitted as soon as possible to the Office of the Treasurer. In the event of serious bodily harm, make a telephone call to report the injury to the Office. Be sure to include the following:

´ Name, address, and telephone number of the person injured and the custodial parent, if applicable.
´ Name of the hospital involved and the treating physician
´ Location, date, time, and description of the accident
´ Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of witnesses and of the person reporting the accident

2. The Office of the Treasurer will report the occurrence to the insurance company and furnish it with the pertinent information. The company will contact the injured person or parent and determine whether any benefits are payable under the policy.

PROOF OF INSURANCE AND CERTIFICATES OF INSURANCE

When an Assembly is asked to furnish proof of insurance coverage to the owner of property which it intends to rent, lease, or use for an event, it should do as follows:

1. Contact the Office of the Treasurer and ask for a "Certificate of Insurance."Please allow enough time for preparation and mailing of the Certificate. Under short notice conditions, you may be asked to reimburse the National Baha'i Fund for overnight mail charges.

2. Be sure to include the following information in the request:

´ Type of event (proclamation, conference, district conven-tion, etc.)
´ Date of event
´ Name and address of sponsoring Assembly
´ Name and address of place where event is to be held
´ Name and address of the property owner
´ Name, address, and telephone number of the person making the request for the Assembly
´ Any special requirements, such asAdditional Insured," any endorsements showinghold harmless clause," Notice of Cancellation coverage, Waiver of Subrogation

3. All contracts should be reviewed carefully and copies sent to [3.43] the Office of the Treasurer prior to issuance of Certificate of Insurance.

CERTIFICATES OF INSURANCE FROM VENDORS, CON-TRACTORS, ETC.
Anyone wishing to do business with the National and Local Assemblies must present a Certificate of Insurance prior to commencement of the work. This Certificate must meet the following minimum requirements:

´ General liability limits of at least:
$2,000,000 general aggregate
$1,000,000 products and completed operations
$1,000,000 personal and advertising injury
$1,000,000 each occurrence
´ Workers" Compensation Insurance; Statutory Employer's Liability„$500,000
´ Automobile insurance with limits of at least $1,000,000 per accident
´ Local Spiritual Assembly should be named as Additional Insured with 30 days Notice of Cancellation required.
´ Contractor's insurance must be with an insurance company rated at least "A" in "Best Reports.

The original Certificate should be retained in the Local Spiritual Assembly's office and a copy should be sent to the Office of the Treasurer.

The insurance provided by the National Spiritual Assembly is constantly being reviewed and is renegotiated annually. While limits of coverage, exclusions, and other features of the coverage do not change drastically from year to year, financial amounts have been provided for Local Spiritual Assemblies" general information.

Any questions regarding insurance coverage should be directed to the Office of the Treasurer.

APPENDIX D

UNIT CONVENTION

PURPOSE OF UNIT CONVENTION

[3.44] The purpose of the Unit Convention, held during the first weekend of October, is to elect one or more delegates to the National Convention and to regionally consult on issues and concerns relevant to their communities and the advancement of the Cause of Baha'u'llah.

He wishes to stress the importance of reminding the believers that they should make every possible effort to attend the meeting for the election of the State or Province [Electoral Unit] delegates, in order to stimulate a larger group consciousness which will greatly facili-tate the process of believers becoming acquainted with each other, and provide an intermediary state„which will become increas-ingly valuable and necessary„between the local organization rep-resented by the group or Assembly, and the activities of the Con-vention and the institution of the National Assembly.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated November 16, 1943, to a National Spiritual Assembly

UNIT CONVENTION IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

A three-stage election has been provided byAbdu'l-Baha for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that thesecondary House of Justice (i.e., National Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal one," it is obvious that the members of the National Spiri-tual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Administration, p. 84

It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Writings that these Na-tional Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the friends; that is, the friends in every country must elect a certain number of del-egates, who in their turn will elect from among all the friends in that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Administration, p. 39-40

The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, [3.45] the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of believers through the local spiritual assemblies.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated November 18, 1933, to a National Spiritual Assembly

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AND THE REGIONAL BAHA'I COUNCILS IN UNIT CONVENTION

The Regional Baha'i Councils will appoint a host for the Unit Convention (usually a Local Spiritual Assembly, a Registered Baha'i Group or a committee) early in the year. The National Spiritual Assembly will establish Electoral Unit boundaries to ensure that all 171 delegates are elected to the National Convention. The Regional Baha'i Councils will forward the following to the

National Spiritual Assembly:

´ All Tellers" Reports from 171 delegates;
´ From the Secretary's Reports„recommendations from Unit Conventions to the National Spiritual Assembly;

The Regional Baha'i Councils will:

´ Appoint Local Spiritual Assemblies to host each Unit Convention;
´ Notify all adult believers in good standing of the Unit Convention;
´ Provide voting lists for each Unit Convention;
´ Ensure that all Tellers" Reports are received and sent to the National Spiritual Assembly;
´ Ensure that all Secretary's Reports are received, review the information and forward recommendations made to the National Spiritual Assembly;
´ Ensure that the host Assembly is directly forwarding all Convention Financial Reports and all contributions collected to the Office of the Treasurer and Development;
´ Receive all questionnaires and apply appropriate information to handling future Unit Conventions.

The National Spiritual Assembly will:

´ Provide financial support for host Assemblies as needed;
´ Ensure that all Financial Reports are received, reviewed, and contributions receipted by the Office of the Treasurer and Development;
´ Send a copy of all financial reports received during Convention to the Regional Baha'i Councils.

[3.46] ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN UNIT CONVENTION
The friends should be encouraged to vie with each other in participation in the affairs of the Cause, and praise should be liberally given to those regions which excel in attendance and in the number voting.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 10, 1972 to a National Spiritual Assembly

On election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things by Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating his aid and bounty.
Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated February 27, 1923 to the friends in Persia

Baha'is from the ages of fifteen through twenty-one have all the rights and privileges of a community member except voting and being voted for in Baha'i elections. Baha'i youth may participate in all the consultations at the Convention; they may also serve as registrars, readers, and helpers to the three permanent tellers. Participation in the Convention in these ways will not only contribute to the success of the occasion, but will also aid in preparing the youth for future service as administrators of the Faith.

YOUTH AND THE UNIT CONVENTION
Baha'i youth may not vote in Baha'i elections and may not be elected to

Assembly membership or as delegates or conven-tion officers. They may, however, exercise all other rights of Baha'i membership.
Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies, 1975

Valuable administrative experience can be gained by youth who attend such events, and they can participate in virtually every phase of the proceedings.... Thus they participate in all phases of the Convention except voting or being voted for in elections, voting on recommendations, or serving as temporary Convention officers.
Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States,
dated June 16, 1975

SUGGESTED READINGS

Baha'i Administration, Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL

Lights of Guidance, A Baha'i Reference File, compiled by Helen Hornby, Baha'i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, India

Principles of Baha'i Administration: A Compilation, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, 1976

4„CONSULTATION

[4.1] THE NATURE OF CONSULTATION

Source of Guidance and Understanding
Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.
Baha'u'llah, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 3

Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 8

Consultation in All Things
In all things it is necessary to consult. This matter should be forcibly stressed by thee, so that consultation may be observed by all. The intent of what hath been revealed from the Pen of the Most High is that consultation may be fully carried out among the friends, inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being.
Baha'u'llah, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 3

For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed. Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of

each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 8-9

The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Baha'i [4.2] activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through cooperation and continued exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.
Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 15

Consultation and the Divine Institutions
The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent.... And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause.
Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 13-14

In its own meetings it [the Assembly] must endeavor to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Baha'i consultation, a process which will require great self-discipline on the part of all members and complete reliance on the power of Baha'u'llah.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 30, 1972,
to a National Spiritual Assembly

Conditions Necessary for Effective Consultation
Prime Requisites
The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Baha shall be vouchsafed to them.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 21

Absolute Love and Harmony of Thought
The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the

assembly. They must be wholly free from [4.3] estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

Baha'u'llah has given the promise that in every Assembly where unity and harmony prevail, there His glorious spirit will not only be present, but will animate, sustain and guide all the friends in all their deliberations.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 16

Patience and Restraint
Patience and restraint, however, should at all times characterize the discussions and deliberations of the elected representatives of the local community, and no fruitless and hair-splitting discussions indulged in, under any circumstances.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 16-17

Prayerfully Seek Divine Assistance
The second condition: They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

Whenever ye enter the council-chamber, recite this prayer with a heart throbbing with the love of God and a tongue purified from all but His remembrance, that the All-Powerful may graciously aid you to achieve supreme victory. O God, my God! We are servants of Thine that have turned with devotion to Thy Holy Face, that have detached ourselves from all beside Thee in this glorious Day. We have gathered in this Spiritual Assembly, united in our views and thoughts, with our purposes harmonized to exalt Thy Word amidst mankind....
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Prayers, pp. 137-38

And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority....
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 64

If Necessary Conditions Are Not Present
In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of [4.4] estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness.... If this be so regarded, that assembly shall be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and alienation....
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 6

Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught.

'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

THE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION

Investigation of Truth

Consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth.
'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 72

They must in every matter search out the truth....
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 6

The Role of Spiritual Principles

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of government and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.
The Universal House of Justice, in The Promise of World Peace, p. 28

Elements of Consultative Discussion

Should Not Cause Conflict

The honored members of the Spiritual Assembly should exert their efforts so that no differences may occur, and if such differences [4.5] do occur, they should not reach the point of causing conflict, hatred and antagonism, which lead to threats. When you notice that a stage has been reached when enmity and threats are about to occur, you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wranglings, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 9

In this Cause, consultation is of vital importance; but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended. In France I was present at a session of the senate but the experience was not impressive. Parliamentary procedure should have for its object the attainment of the light of truth upon questions presented and not furnish a battleground for opposition and self-opinion. Antagonism and contradiction are unfortunate and always

destructive to truth. In the parliamentary meeting mentioned, altercation and useless quibbling were frequent; the result mostly confusion and turmoil; even in one instance a physical encounter took place between two members. It was not consultation but comedy.

...Therefore true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation.
'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 72

The Baha'is must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire„so natural in people„to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 19

Every Member Must Be Free to Express Own Opinion The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another....
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given Assembly.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 79

[4.6] The Guardian would advise you to give up the method of asking other members to voice your opinion and suggestions. This indirect way of expressing your views to the Assembly not only creates an atmosphere of secrecy which is most alien to the spirit of the Cause, but would also lead to many misunderstandings and complications. The Assembly members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express whole-hearted and unqualified obedience to the well-considered judgment and directions of the majority of their fellow-members.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 16

Differing Opinions Is No Cause for Discouragement Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 5

Through the clash of personal opinions, as 'Abdu'l-Baha has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and Divine guidance revealed. The friends should therefore not feel discouraged at the differences of opinion that may prevail among the members of an Assembly, for these, as experience has shown, and as the Master's words attest, fulfill a valuable function in all Assembly deliberations.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 16

The second principle is that of detachment in consultation. The members of an

Assembly must learn to express their views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancor. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offense or belittling the views of another. Baha'i consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindliness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and, realizing this, no member should take offense at another member's statements.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 26, 1965,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 590

Do Not Stubbornly Cling to Personal Opinions
They must...not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

[4.7] If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 10

The Promise of Divine Assistance
Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the host of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 6

If a few souls gather together in a beloved meeting with the feelings of the Kingdom, with the divine attractions, with pure hearts and with absolute purity and holiness, to consort in spirit and fragrance, that gathering will have its effect upon all the world. The conditions, the words and the deeds of that gathering will lead the world to eternal happiness and will be an evidence of the favors of the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit will strengthen them and the hosts of the Supreme Concourse will render them victorious and the angels of Abha will come in succession.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 6-7

Uncompromising in Principle; Flexible in Procedure
In matters of principle, therefore, there should be uniformity, while in matters of detail and procedure not only is diversity permitted, it is also encouraged. As conditions vary from country to country and, indeed, can vary from community to community within the country, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly advised the friends that they should be uncompromising in principle but flexible in subsidiary details.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 22, 1986,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 137

REACHING A DECISION

Additional Facts May Be Necessary

When it is proposed to put a matter to the vote, a member of the Assembly may feel that there are additional facts or views which must be sought before he can make up his mind and intelligently vote on the proposition. He should express this feeling to the Assembly, and it is for the Assembly to decide whether or not further consultation is needed before voting.

The Universal House of Justice, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 21

Ideal to Arrive at Unanimous Decision

Indeed, it has ever been the cherished desire of our Master, 'Abdu'l-Baha, that the friends in their councils, local as well as national, should by their candor, their honesty of purpose, their singleness of [4.8] mind, and the thoroughness of their discussions, achieve unanimity in all things.

Shoghi Effendi, January 29, 1925, in Baha'i Administration, p. 80

Baha'is are not required to vote on an assembly against their consciences. It is better if they submit to the majority view and make it unanimous. But they are not forced to.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 19

The ideal of Baha'i consultation is to arrive at a unanimous decision. When this is not possible a vote must be taken.

The Universal House of Justice, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 21

No Dissenting Votes in the Cause

There are no dissenting votes in the Cause. When the majority of an assembly decides a matter the minority, we are told by the Master, should accept this. To insist on having one's dissenting vote recorded is not good, and achieves no constructive end.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated March 19, 1950, to an individual believer

Abstaining Does Not Exist in Baha'i Voting

Whenever it is decided to vote on a proposition all that is required is to ascertain how many of the members are in favor of it; if this is a majority of those present, the motion is carried; if it is a minority, the motion is defeated. Thus the whole question of "abstaining" does not arise in Baha'i voting. A member who does not vote in favor of a proposition is, in effect, voting against it, even if at that moment he himself feels that he has been unable to make up his mind on the matter.

The Universal House of Justice, in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 21-22

A Motion Is Not Required

Although the making of a motion is not required in Baha'i consultation, it is frequently a useful mechanism and Baha'is are free to employ it. In any case, all members should be given the opportunity to express themselves fully before decisions are made, and no action should be taken that stifles the flow of consultation or forces premature decisions.

AFTER A DECISION IS REACHED

As soon as a decision is reached it becomes the decision of the whole Assembly, not merely of those members who happened to be among the majority.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 6, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[4.9] Majority Decision Must Be Upheld
But once the opinion of the majority has been ascertained, all the members should automatically and unreservedly obey it, and faithfully carry it out.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 16

It is again not permitted that any one of the honored members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

Specially those dissenting members within the assembly whose opinion is contrary to that of the majority of their fellow-members should set a good example before the community by sacrificing their personal views for the sake of obeying the principle of majority vote that underlies the functioning of all Baha'i assemblies.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 16

The Baha'is are fully entitled to address criticisms to their assemblies; they can freely air their views about policies or individual members of elected bodies to the assembly, local or national, but then they must whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the assembly, according to the principles already laid down for such matters in Baha'i administration....
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 35

We all have a right to our opinions, we are bound to think differently; but a Baha'i must accept the majority decision of his Assembly, realizing that acceptance and harmony„even if a mistake has been made„are the really important things, and when we serve the Cause properly, in the Baha'i way, God will right any wrongs done in the end.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 27

If Majority View Is Wrong Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Individual Rights and Freedoms in the
World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 13-14

[4.10] The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out, if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual Baha'i, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have confidence in this and obey our Assemblies.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 27

If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 7

Reconsideration of a Decision
He (a Spiritual Assembly member) can ask the Assembly to reconsider a matter, but he has no right to force them or create inharmony because they won't change.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 19

A believer can ask the Assembly why they made a certain decision and politely request them to reconsider. But then he must leave it at that, and not go on disrupting local affairs through insisting on his own views. This applies to an Assembly member as well.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 27

Appeal of a Decision
Whenever there is any infringement of Baha'i rights, or lapse in the proper procedure, the friends should take the matter up with the Assembly concerned, and, if not satisfied, then with the National Spiritual Assembly. This is both their privilege and their duty.
Shoghi Effendi, July 10, 1942, enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 1, 1989

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Handling Appeals

CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS

Fact-Gathering
When consulting on a matter an Assembly may find that all the facts can be supplied by a few members of the Assembly or that the facts may be common knowledge to the members. At times, it may be necessary to obtain further facts. The Assembly may appoint Assembly or community members to gather the facts on its behalf. In advance of each meeting, the Assembly should agree on the purpose of the consultation, should assemble the facts, and decide the questions and points to be discussed or clarified during the meeting. During consultation with individual believers, the Assembly should observe the following principles:

´ [4.11] The impartiality of each of its members with respect to all matters under discussion
´ The freedom of the individual to express his/her views, feelings and recommendations
´ The confidential character of the consultation

Interviews should be conducted with loving-kindness and tact, and efforts should be made to help the person being interviewed feel comfortable in the presence of the Assembly or its representatives. The Assembly members should be careful not to share their personal opinions during the interview. The Spiritual Assembly should not make any final decision until the party or

parties have left the meeting.

Cooperating with the Assembly
When an allegation is made that a believer has violated Baha'i law, irrespective of the consequence in civil law, the process of investigation calls for a diligent and persistent effort by the Assembly to ascertain the facts, and for wholehearted cooperation of all concerned in the search for truth. Believers called upon to provide information should, if necessary, be reminded of the responsibility they bear to speak the truth and of the spiritual consequences of a failure to do so. 'Abdu'l-Baha asserts:

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness, progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

If this "holy attribute" should adorn the behavior of believers toward others, how much more should it characterize statements which a Baha'i makes to a divinely ordained institution.

The prospect of a believer's displaying an attitude of hostility, when being interviewed by a Spiritual Assembly or its representatives who are seeking to determine the facts of a matter, is abhorrent. All believers are strongly enjoined to have the utmost respect for the Assemblies, to cooperate fully with them, and to support their decisions. An Assembly inquiring into a matter should not allow itself to be deterred by the hostility of a believer who is withholding relevant information; it should appeal to him for cooperation, remind him forcefully of his responsibilities and, in extreme cases such as threats made to the investigators, warn him of the [4.12] administrative consequences of the persistence of his deplorable conduct.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 24, 1991, to a National Spiritual Assembly

May Assign Counseling to Individuals or Committees
Although Local Spiritual Assemblies are primarily responsible for counseling believers regarding personal problems, there may be times, when in the judgment of the National or Local Assembly, it would be preferable to assign counseling or advisory duties to individuals or committees. This is within the discretion of the Assembly.
The Universal House of Justice, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 21

Personal Consultation with Assembly Members
Assembly Cannot Require Member to Absent Himself
Concerning the question of the presence of a member of an Assembly during the discussion of his personal problems, all members of a Spiritual Assembly have the right and duty to participate in all meetings of the Assembly. The Assembly cannot require a member to absent himself from a properly called Assembly meeting.

Should an Assembly, not being aware of this instruction, rule otherwise, the

member must nevertheless obey the Assembly. If he conscientiously feels that an injustice has been done his remedy is to appeal the decision of the Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 23, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Member May Wish to Absent Himself
Naturally, if one wishes to absent himself while his own situation is being discussed...there is no objection.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 23, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It should also be understood that a member may wish to absent himself from a meeting at which subjects in which he is personally involved are to be discussed. In such cases he may do so unless the Assembly requires him to be present.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 22, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Non-Assembly Members in Attendance
Concerning the attendance of certain individuals at the meeting of the Assemblies and at the invitation of that body. This, Shoghi Effendi considers to be as expert advice which is absolutely necessary for good administration. The members of the Assembly are not supposed to know everything on every subject, so they can [4.13] invite persons, versed in that question, to attend their meetings and explain his views. But naturally he will have no right to vote.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 23, 1926,
in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 13-14

The following advice was given by Shoghi Effendi in response to a request by a National Spiritual Assembly to have a non-member present throughout its deliberations to take notes and keep minutes of the Assembly's decisions. It does not contradict the guidance given in the letter of October 23, 1926.

The Guardian regrets that, in the light of the Master's statement that the deliberations of Assemblies must be secret and confidential, it is not possible to have a non-Assembly member in the National Spiritual Assembly meeting.... Highly personal subjects, damaging to the honor and happiness of others, are often taken up by National Assemblies, and the danger that confidence will be betrayed is already great enough with the nine chosen representatives of the whole community, let alone introducing non-Assembly members. You will just have to make your minutes a little more compact and sacrifice, if necessary, a certain amount of efficiency in order to follow this very important principle.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation: A Compilation, pp. 19-20

One of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i Administration is that, other than the members of the Assembly, no one should be present when a decision of the Assembly is being taken. It is a necessary practice that Assemblies meet with the Hands of the Cause, Counselors, Auxiliary Board members, or other individuals, and freely consult with them on different issues and even arrive

sometimes at a joint conclusion; however, only members of an Assembly should be present when a final decision is taken. This principle applies, of course, to the functioning of other elected or appointed corporate bodies, such as Regional Baha'i Councils.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 2, 1997, to an individual believer

It is permissible for any Spiritual Assembly to call in youth or anyone else for consultation on matters affecting the progress of the Cause. However, it is not permissible for anyone not a member of an Assembly to sit in on all sessions nor to be present at a time [4.14] when the Assembly is in the actual process of consultation on a particular problem with a view to reaching a decision.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, third edition, p. 56, par. 2.1.9

Interpreter
The House of Justice has instructed us to say that in cases where a member of an Assembly is unable to communicate with other members of that Assembly where a different language is employed, there is no objection to having an interpreter present at their meetings. However, the Local Assembly itself should approve the selection of the interpreter.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 13, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Assembly Not Only Channel to Which Baha'is May Turn
When a believer has a problem concerning which he must make a decision, he has several courses open to him. If it is a matter that affects the interests of the Faith he should consult with the appropriate Assembly or committee, but individuals have many problems which are purely personal and there is no obligation upon them to take such problems to the institutions of the Faith; indeed, when the needs of the teaching work are of such urgency it is better if the friends will not burden their Assemblies with personal problems that they can solve by themselves.

A Baha'i who has a problem may wish to make his own decision upon it after prayer and after weighing all the aspects of it in his own mind; he may prefer to seek the counsel of individual friends or of professional counselors such as his doctor or lawyer so that he can consider such advice when making his decision; or in a case where several people are involved, such as a family situation, he may want to gather together those who are affected so that they may arrive at a collective decision. There is also no objection whatever to a Baha'i's asking a group of people to consult together on a problem facing him.
The Universal House of Justice, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 22

Consultation Differs from Confession
It should be borne in mind that all consultation is aimed at arriving at a solution to a problem and is quite different from the sort of group baring of

the soul that is popular in some circles these days and which borders on the kind of confession that is forbidden in the Faith. On the subject of confession the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer: "We are forbidden to confess to any person, as do the Catholics to their priests, our sins and shortcomings, or to do so in public, as some religious sects do. 4.15] However, if we spontaneously desire to acknowledge we have been wrong in something, or that we have some fault of character, and ask another person's forgiveness or pardon, we are quite free to do so. The Guardian wants to point out, however, that we are not obliged to do so. It rests entirely with the individual.'
The Universal House of Justice, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 23

Confidentiality
1. Any information which comes to the notice of an Assembly member, solely by reason of his membership on that Assembly must not be divulged by that member, even though the Assembly itself may later decide to share it.

2. The Assembly must itself carefully consider which information should rightly fall in the category of confidential information and which should not be shared with others, and which information may be divulged under special circumstances, and how such information may be divulged. Should confidential matters regarding personal problems be freely shared with others, upon application, the confidence of the believers in the Assembly and its members will obviously be destroyed.

3. It must be remembered that individuals can reform, and a reprehensible past does not necessarily disqualify a believer from a better future.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 18, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Assembly Communications")

Every institution in the Faith has certain matters which it considers should be kept confidential, and any member who is privy to such confidential information is obliged to preserve the confidentiality within the institution where he learned it. Such matters, however, are but a small portion of the business of any Baha'i institution. Most subjects dealt with are of common interest and can be discussed openly with anyone. Where no confidentiality is involved the institutions must strive to avoid the stifling atmosphere of secrecy; on the other hand, every believer must know that he can confide a personal problem to an institution of the Faith, with the assurance that knowledge of the matter will remain confidential.

Members of Assemblies Who Are Also Assistants to Auxiliary Board Members
Members of Assemblies, whether they are assistants [to Auxiliary Board members] or not, are obviously in a position to receive confidential information as individuals from several sources. It is an [4.16] important principle of the Faith that one must not promise what one is not going to fulfill. Therefore, if a Baha'i accepts confidential information either by virtue of his profession (e.g. as a doctor, a lawyer, etc.), or by permitting another person to confide

in him, he is in duty bound to preserve that confidentiality.

Assistants who are members of a National Assembly or a national committee do not function as assistants in relation to that body, and they have the same duty to observe the confidentiality of its consultations, and of matters considered by the Assembly to be confidential, as does any other member.

...It should be clear to the believers that they are not justified in assuming that because a matter is known to individual members of the Assembly it is therefore before the Assembly itself. If a believer wishes to bring a matter to the Assembly's attention he should do so explicitly and officially. If a member of the Assembly knows of a personal problem, and if he has not undertaken to keep it confidential, he may bring it to the Assembly's attention if he feels it would be in the interests of the Faith for him to do so, but he is not obliged to.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 2, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 1, Section entitled "The Assistants to the Auxiliary Board Members" and Chapter 15, Section entitled "Confidentiality")

THE INDIVIDUAL: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND CRITICISM

Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views....
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 63

Right of Individual to Self-Expression
The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 87

[4.17] As to freedom of expression, a fundamental principle of the Cause, the Administrative Order provides unique methods and channels for its exercise and maintenance; these have been amply described in the writings of the Faith, but they are not yet clearly understood by the friends. For Baha'u'llah has extended the scope and deepened the meaning of self-expression. In His elevation of art and of work performed in the service of humanity to acts of worship can be discerned enormous prospects for a new birth of expression in the civilization anticipated by His World Order. The significance of this principle, now so greatly amplified by the Lord of the Age, cannot be doubted; but it is in its ramifications in speech that keen understanding is urgently needed. From a Baha'i point of view, the exercise of freedom of speech must necessarily be disciplined by a profound appreciation of both the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, on the one hand, and of speech, on the other.

Baha'u'llah warns us that "the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison." "Material fire consumeth the body," He says in

elaborating the point, "whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century." In tracing the framework of free speech, He again advises "moderation." "Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation," He states, adding: "As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets."

Also relevant to what is said, and how, is when it is said. For speech, as for so many other things, there is a season. Baha'u'llah reinforces this understanding by drawing attention to the maxim that, "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.'

Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgement, since both the limitation of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist in the system of Baha'u'llah checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful examination [4.18] of the principles of Baha'i consultation and the formal and informal arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of freedom of expression.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 12-13

Criticism
Offering Criticism
You had asked whether the believers have the right to openly express their criticism of any Assembly action or policy; it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the Community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community, and it is the duty of the Assembly also to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them by any one of the believers. The best occasion chosen for this purpose is the Nineteen Day Feast which, besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the Community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Baha'i Community.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feasts, pp. 27-28

The Baha'is are fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies; they can freely air their views about policies or individual members of elected bodies to the Assembly, local or national, but then they must wholeheartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly, according to the principles

already laid down for such matters in Baha'i administration.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 13, 1945,
enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 1, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is clear then that criticism is allowed, but it should be addressed to the institutions of the Faith and not aired in the community where it might foment division and misunderstandings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 12, 1988, to individual believers

(See also Chapter 9, Section entitled "The Administrative and Consultative Aspect")

Negative Results of Excessive Criticism
The Guardian believes that a great deal of the difficulties from which the believers...feel themselves to be suffering are [4.19] caused by their neither correctly understanding or putting into practice the administration. They seem„many of them„to be prone to continually challenging and criticizing the decisions of their assemblies. If the Baha'is undermine the very leaders which are, however immaturely, seeking to coordinate Baha'i activities and administer Baha'i affairs, if they continually criticize their acts and challenge or belittle their decisions, they not only prevent any real rapid progress in the Faith's development from taking place, but they repel outsiders who quite rightly may ask how we ever expect to unite the whole world when we are so disunited among ourselves!
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly, pp. 35-36

As to negative and hostile criticism, the following extracts have a direct bearing:

Vicious criticism is indeed a calamity. But its root is lack of faith in the system of Baha'u'llah, i.e., the Administrative Order„and lack of obedience to Him„for He has forbidden it! If the Baha'is would follow the Baha'i laws in voting, in electing, in serving and in abiding by Assembly decisions, all this waste of strength through criticizing others could be diverted into cooperation and achieving the Plan....(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated December 18, 1949, to an individual believer)

...It should be stressed that all criticism and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community. (Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated December 13, 1939, to an individual believer)
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 12, 1988, to individual believers

Underlying Spirit of the Cause Must Be Preserved

In exercising their privilege to contribute to the consultation in...gatherings or publications, Baha'is are enjoined to be courteous and considerate of others, to be moderate in tone and to not insist on the correctness of their views; however, such conditions should not preclude the frank expression of differing views. Baha'u'llah has forbidden "conflict" and "contention'; open disputation in the public arena over matters in the Baha'i teachings is an inappropriate means of clarifying difficult issues. It can be extremely harmful [4.20] to the interests of the Faith if Baha'is who hold strong opinions but are not well-versed in the teachings publish documents which attack basic tenets of the Faith or undermine the authority of Baha'u'llah Himself. There is ample scope within the channels of the Administrative Order for questions to be raised and discussed in a manner which avoids dispute.
Enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 1, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

...Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic's right to self-expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved, the authority of its laws and ordinances safeguarded, authority being an indispensable aspect of freedom. Motive, manner, mode, become relevant; but there is also the matter of love: love for one's fellows, love for one's community, love for one's institutions.

The responsibility resting on the individual to conduct himself in such a way as to ensure the stability of society takes on elemental importance in this context. For vital as it is to the progress of society, criticism is a two-edged sword: It is all too often the harbinger of conflict and contention. The balanced processes of the Administrative Order are meant to prevent this essential activity from degenerating to any form of dissent that breeds opposition and its dreadful schismatic consequences. How incalculable have been the negative results of ill-directed criticism: in the catastrophic divergences it has created in religion, in the equally contentious factions it has spawned in political systems, which have dignified conflict by institutionalizing such concepts as the "loyal opposition" which attach to one or another of the various categories of political opinion„conservative, liberal, progressive, reactionary, and so on.

If Baha'i individuals deliberately ignore the principles imbedded in the Order which Baha'u'llah Himself has established to remedy divisiveness in the human family, the Cause for which so much has been sacrificed will surely be set back in its mission to rescue world society from complete disintegration. May not the existence of the Covenant be invoked again and again, so that such repetition may preserve the needed perspective? For, in this age, the Cause of Baha'u'llah has been protected against the baneful effects of the misuse of the process of criticism; this has been done by the institution of the Covenant and by the provision of a [4.21] universal administrative system which incorporates within itself the mechanisms for drawing out the constructive ideas of individuals and using them for the benefit of the entire system. Admonishing the people to uphold the unifying purpose of the Cause, Baha'u'llah, in the

Book of His Covenant, addresses these poignant words to them: "Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord." Such assertions emphasize a crucial point; it is this: In terms of the Covenant, dissidence is a moral and intellectual contradiction of the main objective animating the Baha'i community, namely, the establishment of the unity of mankind.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 15-16

SUGGESTED READINGS

Consultation: A Compilation, Extracts from the Writings and Utterances of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi, and The Universal House of Justice, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, a letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Baha'u'llah in the United States of America, December 29, 1988

The Local Spiritual Assembly: An Institution of the Baha'i Administrative Order, compiled by the Universal House of Justice

Consultation, John Kolstoe

Developing Genius, John Kolstoe

5„PROTECTION OF THE FAITH

THE COVENANT

[5.1] Power of the Covenant
Know this for a certainty that today, the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through any power except through the power of the Covenant. There is no other power like unto this. This Spirit of the Covenant is the real Center of love and is reflecting its rays to all parts of the globe, which are resuscitating and regenerating man and illuminating the path to the Divine Kingdom.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in The Covenant of Baha'u'llah, p. 71

The Greater and Lesser Covenants
There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent.... It is a Covenant of this kind that Baha'u'llah made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha, and that 'Abdu'l-Baha perpetuated through the Administrative Order that Baha'u'llah had already created.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated March 3, 1975, to an individual believer

Perpetuation of the Covenant

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsan (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi,„the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two [5.2] offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,„as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 11

Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 19

They (Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha) have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the re quirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 19-20

The Passing of Shoghi Effendi

After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the view of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

The Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 11

The passing of Shoghi Effendi and the break of the expected continuation of the line of Guardians raised many questions among the believers. Detailed letters addressing many of these questions can be found in Wellspring of Guidance, pages 44-56 and 81-91 and Messages of the Universal House of Justice, pages 37-43.

REVIEWING BAHA'I LITERATURE AND MATERIALS

Purpose of Review

The purpose of review is to protect the Faith against misrepresentations by its own followers at this early stage of its existence when comparatively few

people have any knowledge of it. An [5.3] erroneous presentation of the Teachings by a Baha'i who is accounted a scholar, in a scholarly journal, would, by that very fact, do far more harm than an erroneous presentation made by an obscure Baha'i author with no pretensions to scholarship.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 8, 1980, to an individual believer

Some of the friends have suggested that the emergence of the Faith from obscurity indicates the timeliness of ceasing observance in the Baha'i community of certain restraints; particularly are they concerned about the temporary necessity of review before publishing....

The Faith is as yet in its infancy. Despite its emergence from obscurity, even now the vast majority of the human race remains ignorant of its existence; moreover, the vast majority of its adherents are relatively new Baha'is. The change implied by this new stage in its evolution is that whereas heretofore this tender plant was protected in its obscurity from the attention of external elements, it has now become exposed. This exposure invites close observation, and that observation will eventually lead to opposition in various quarters. So, far from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public. A greater effort, a greater care must now be exercised to ensure its protection against the malice of the ignorant and the unwisdom of its friends.

...From this perspective we must all...be concerned about the effects of words, especially those put in print. It is here that Baha'i authors and publishers need to be attentive and exert rigorous discipline upon themselves, as well as abide by the requirements of review at this early stage in the development of the Faith.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 18-20

Role of the National Spiritual Assembly and Local Spiritual Assembly in Reviewing Publications
The National Spiritual Assembly]...shall supervise the publication and distribution of Baha'i literature, the reviewing of all writings pertaining to the Baha'i Cause....
Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly
of the Baha'is of the United States, p. 13

They [Local Spiritual Assemblies] must supervise in these days when the Cause is still in its infancy all Baha'i publications and translations, and provide in general for a dignified and accurate [5.4] presentation of all Baha'i literature and its distribution to the general public.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 38

The National Spiritual Assembly is responsible for the reviewing of material intended for nationwide publication. The Local Spiritual Assembly reviews material intended for publication or distribution within its own community.

Reviewing Committees
It is recommended that Reviewing Committees be small, composed of two or three believers with adequate education and knowledge of the Cause. It is essential that works submitted be dealt with promptly. The standards to be upheld by reviewers are the following: (a) conformity with the Teachings, (b) accuracy, (c) dignity in presentation. The Spiritual Assembly, on the basis of its Reviewing Committee's report, gives or withholds approval of the work.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Criteria for Review
The standards to be upheld by reviewers are the following: (a) conformity with the Teachings, (b) accuracy, (c) dignity in presentation.
The Universal House of Justice, in Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing, dated Ridvan, 1971

The function of reviewing is, essentially, to check the author's exposition of the Baha'i Faith and its teachings, which may include verification of any quotations from the Baha'i writings. This function should not be confused with evaluation of the literary merit of a work or of its value as a publication, which are normally the prerogative of the publisher....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 11, 1965

In general the function of a reviewing committee is to say whether the work submitted gives an acceptable presentation of the Cause or not.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Materials to Be Reviewed
At this early stage of the Cause all works by Baha'is which deal with the Faith, whether in the form of books, pamphlets, translations, poems, songs, radio and television scripts, films, recordings, [5.5] etc. must be approved before submission for publication, whether to a Baha'i or non-Baha'i publisher.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Persian Language Materials
In 1982 the Universal House of Justice appointed a panel of reviewers "...in order to facilitate and organize the publishing of Baha'i literature in the Persian Language." In a letter dated July 26, 1982 to a number of National Spiritual Assemblies contemplating such publications, they were directed that "Publications will be permissible only when [at least two] members of the panel have agreed what changes, if any, should be made, and have informed you that they agree to its publication."

The members of the panel reside in various countries. Therefore, the coordination of the work has been assigned to the Persian/American Affairs Office. All manuscripts are to be forwarded to that office at the Baha'i National Center.

Written Materials

Spiritual Assemblies [have the] responsibility to protect the dignity of the Faith and uphold the proper standard of reverence in the use of its Sacred Scriptures. Thus, if an Assembly sees that one of the friends is making use of any of the Holy Texts in an unbefitting manner, it should remonstrate with him and, if necessary, require him to stop doing so.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 4, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Approval of Work Approved Elsewhere

While a National Spiritual Assembly intending to publish Baha'i literature is encouraged to accept the review of another National Spiritual Assembly, it is not required to do so and has the right to review any work prior to authorizing its publication or republication by its own Publishing Trust or publisher in its area of jurisdiction. This does not apply to works by Hands of the Cause, which are reviewed in the Holy Land.

A National Spiritual Assembly which receives for approval a manuscript from outside its area of jurisdiction should inquire whether it has already been submitted for review elsewhere, and in the case of its having been refused approval, the reasons for such refusal.

Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

[5.6] Baha'i Authors

Baha'i authors should welcome review of their works, and can greatly assist promptness in review by supplying a sufficient number of copies of the manuscript for each member of the Reviewing Committee to have one.

Baha'i authors may submit their works for review to any National Spiritual Assembly, and may send their works, once approved, to any publisher they like, Baha'i or non-Baha'i, at home or abroad. It should be remembered, however, that the approval should be given by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country where the work is to be first published. And in the case of a non-Baha'i publisher the author should insist on use of the system of transliteration at present used by the Faith for languages employing the Roman alphabet.

It is hoped that Baha'i authors will provide a constant stream of new works. Introductory books, commentaries, dissertations on various aspects of the Revelation, text books, histories, reviews, audio-visual materials are all needed to stimulate study of the Faith and to promote the vital teaching work.

Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Translations

As regards English, the beloved Guardian's translations are obviously the most authentic and should be used. If, for some particular reason, a Baha'i author when quoting a passage of the Sacred Text which has been rendered into English by the Guardian, wishes to use a translation other than that made by the beloved Guardian, his request may be referred to the Universal House of

Justice. Passages from the Sacred Text not translated by Shoghi Effendi, but already in English and published with approval, maybe used. If an author wishes to make his own translation of a passage not already translated by Shoghi Effendi, the new translation may be submitted to the Universal House of Justice for approval.

With the exception of certain oriental languages such as Turkish, Arabic and Urdu, which are related to the original Persian or Arabic, new translations of the Sacred Text into languages other than English must be made from the Guardian's English translation where it exists. When there is no translation into English by Shoghi Effendi of a particular passage, the National Spiritual Assembly concerned should seek the advice of the Universal House of Justice. When translations already exists, which are not made from [5.7] the Guardian's English text, but have been published and approved, they may be used.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Baha'i Publishers
Baha'i publishers may not publish any work about the Faith until it has been approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country where it is to be published.

Approval of a work imposes no obligation upon any Baha'i publisher to publish it.

Whatever "house styles" Publishing Trusts and other Baha'i publishers may adopt, transliteration of oriental terms into languages using the Roman alphabet must at present be according to the system chosen by the Guardian and described in volumes of "The Baha'i World'.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Approval Notice
Although no Baha'i work may be published without approval, it is not mandatory to print an approval notice in any publication.

Editing
Baha'i publishers, when accepting a work for publication, will make their own arrangements with the author on all such matters as accuracy of quotations, documentation, grammar and spelling, dates and even the rewriting of passages which the publisher may consider need improving, or he may ask the author to write additional material or to delete part of the original manuscript.
Although such matters are entirely between the author and publisher, any addition, deletion or changes which affect the meaning must be submitted for review with the relative context.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the
Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

Cables in English should be printed exactly as received, without interpolation.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the

Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

(See also Chapter 11, Section entitled "Baha'i Scholarship," pp. 11.12-15)

[5.8] Music
The standards of dignity and reverence set by the beloved Guardian should always be upheld, particularly in musical and dramatic items....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 2, 1967, to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

It is entirely proper to set prayers to music, and the friends are free to sing prayers in unison. Indeed, assuming that the music is appropriate and that the believers do not make a ritual out of it, it is highly praiseworthy for choirs to sing appropriate verses revealed by Baha'u'llah and the Master.... We would assume also that the friends will always keep in mind that whether read, chanted, or sung, prayers should be uttered with a proper sense of reverence.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 6, 1973

We have not come across any instruction which would prohibit the setting of the obligatory prayers to music. However, because of the spiritual nature, we do not consider it appropriate to do so.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 6, 1996, to a National Spiritual Assembly

We have found nothing in the text forbidding the use of the Greatest Name, the names of the Manifestations of God or the names of the Central Figures of our Faith in the lyrics of music. However, we feel that when they are used they should be used with reverence and respect, both in the manner in which they are incorporated in the lyrics and in the manner of representation.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 20, 1972

Jewelry, Needlework, Painting, Etc.
Materials prepared for wide distribution beyond the locality of origin, including jewelry, needlework, paintings and so on, must be reviewed by the National Spiritual Assembly before they are produced or published.

The essential principle is the preservation of a dignified and accurate presentation of the Faith.

Reverence in Relation to the Review Process
Portrayals of Holy Figures
The Faith can certainly be dramatized, but two things must be remembered: no personal presentation of the Bab, Baha'u'llah or the Master, only their Words can be used, but no figure must represent Them; great dignity must be the keynote.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, August 19, 1951,
in Baha'i News, #253, March 1952, p. 1

[5.9] With reference to your question whether the Figures of the Bab and Baha'u'llah should be made to appear as characters in dramatic works written by the believers, Shoghi Effendi's opinion is that such an attempt to dramatize

the Manifestations would be highly disrespectful, and hence should be avoided by the friends, even in the case of the Master. Besides it would be practically impossible to carry out such a plan faithfully, and in a dignified and befitting manner.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, January 27, 1935,
in Baha'i News, #90, March 1935, p. 1

However, there can be no objection to symbolic representation of such Holy Figures, provided it does not become a ritual and that the symbol used is not irreverent.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 3, 1972

Pictures, Portraits of 'Abdu'l-Baha
Though he sees no objection to people having portraits of the Master in their homes, if it gives them pleasure, he prefers that for distribution and for purchase, they should confine themselves to His photographs, as these are, of course, a much more perfect likeness of Him.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated July 11, 1942, to an individual believer

Although the House of Justice does not wish to prohibit the use of photographs and drawings of the Master they should be used most sparingly and always in a dignified context in keeping with the station of 'Abdu'l-Baha. It is felt that drawings of the Master executed in a cartoon style and showing rays of light emanating from His head are not appropriate and should be discouraged.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 27, 1978, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 12, Section entitled "Uses of Pictures of 'Abdu'l-Baha")

Record and Film of 'Abdu'l-Baha
The Guardian, when referring to this record [of 'Abdu'l-Baha's voice], requested the friends "to exercise restraint and caution." "In my view," he added, "it should be used only on special occasions and be listened to with the utmost reverence. The dignity of the Cause, I am sure, would suffer from too wide and indiscriminate use of one of the most precious relics of our departed Master."

...We are confident that all the friends will strictly observe the Guardian's exhortation and will not overstep the bounds of [5.10] courtesy and moderation in the use of a precious relic so lovingly left to us by the Center of the Covenant.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 23, 1971, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Regarding the use of the Master's film the greatest care must be exercised lest we cheapen its value by too frequent and indiscriminate exhibition either amongst the believers or the non-Baha'is. Only on special occasions, such as important anniversaries, should the film be shown and its solemn sacred character should be duly emphasized.

Shoghi Effendi, letter dated February 28, 1928

Note: Neither the film nor the recording should be copied, either for sale or to be given away.

Use of the Greatest Name

The overriding consideration must always be the proper dignity with which the Greatest Name should be used. Thus it would not be befitting to use it on drinking vessels or ash trays, plates for eating, and the like. There would, however, be no objection to its use on plaques or ornaments, jewelry or similar items which are not normally put to common use. The House of Justice instructs us to say that great care should be given to the accurate representation of the Persian calligraphy, since any deviation from an accepted representation can be distressing to Iranian believers.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 12, 1980

Although there exists an instruction that the symbol of the Greatest Name should not be used on gravestones, no instruction has been found prohibiting the use of the symbol of the Greatest Name on any other particular item, such as jewelry, books or pamphlets. However, the Greatest Name should not be used in an undignified manner. Nothing has been found which would prohibit a believer from manufacturing and selling items using the Greatest Name provided that the manner in which the Greatest Name is used is dignified.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 1975

We are requested by the Universal House of Justice to share with you the following guidelines on the use of the symbols of the Greatest Name.

The Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual on 5 August 1949, stated:

[5.11] "It is better not to encourage the use of this symbol on stationery and in paintings."

Likewise, the Universal House of Justice, in its letter to a National Assembly stated:

"We wish to call to your attention the impressions of the Greatest Name on the back of the envelope in which your letter was enclosed. This use of the Greatest Name is not befitting and we ask you to discontinue it." (16 May 1971)

In another communication regarding this subject, the following was written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Assembly:

"We are instructed to say that it would not be appropriate to use the symbol of the Greatest Name on the official stationery of a Local Spiritual Assembly." (6 November 1984)

While the House of Justice is reluctant to issue a list of the specific uses of the Greatest Name which should be avoided, the principal thing is for the friends to realize the great sacredness of this symbol, and to use it in ways which are dignified and appropriate....

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 3, 1987, in Lights of Guidance, p. 267

Trademarks
To protect the Faith against misuse of certain of its terms and symbols, and to prevent their becoming public domain (that is, open for use by anyone in any manner), the National Spiritual Assembly has taken the precaution of having terms and symbols identified with the Baha'i Faith legally registered as Baha'i trademarks.

Any items identified with the Baha'i Faith should not be reproduced for commercial use or local publicity purposes without first securing permission from the Baha'i Publishing Trust. Before manufacturing or selling items with the Greatest Name, the items must first be submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly for review.

Copyrights
Copyright laws protect literary, musical and artistic works by ensuring that individual works are not copied without permission. Reproducing copyrighted material without first gaining permission may result in legal action against the user.

(See also in this Chapter, Appendix, "Use of Copyrighted Material")

[5.12] Sale and Distribution of Baha'i Literature
1. Baha'i publications reviewed and published in one country may be sold or offered for sale anywhere in the world. This includes the right of the publisher or the author to promote the sale of the publication in any legitimate manner including the right to advise the Baha'is in any country of its contents, price and availability. It does not include the right to insist that National Spiritual Assemblies, their Publishing Trusts or Publishing Committees stock, promote or advertise the publication or offer it for sale. If any National Spiritual Assembly feels that a book would be damaging to the Faith in its country, it may present this fact to the publisher and author and ask them not to promote it in that particular country.

It is hoped that there will be great cooperation among those publishing Baha'i literature, and Publishing Trusts are encouraged to supply to believers, to book trade and libraries, all Baha'i publications from any country.

2. Believers should not be prevented from purchasing Baha'i books reviewed and published in other countries.

3. National Spiritual Assemblies are not obliged to furnish mailing lists of believers to publishers, but publishers may compile their own mailing lists and use them for the announcement and promotion of sale of their Baha'i books and literature.

4. Five copies of every new book and every new edition (not reprints) should be sent to the World Center.
Memorandum on Baha'i Publishing from the

Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1971

COVENANT-BREAKING

The Meaning of Covenant-Breaking

When a person declares his acceptance of Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God he becomes a party to the Covenant and accepts the totality of His Revelation. If he then turns round and attacks Baha'u'llah or the Central Institution of the Faith he violates the Covenant. If this happens every effort is made to help that person to see the illogicality and error of his actions, but if he persists he must, in accordance with the instructions of Baha'u'llah Himself, be shunned as a Covenant-breaker.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1975, to an individual believer

The actions of the Covenant-breakers, 'Abdu'l-Baha tells us, are motivated by personal desires, human pride, and an insatiable desire for leadership and power. Although "they are perfectly aware," their awareness is insufficient to restrain them from their destructive actions.

[5.13] It is important to understand what Covenant-breaking is not. Those who break Baha'i law, who withdraw from the Faith or who reject Baha'u'llah's claim to be a Manifestation of God are not Covenant-breakers.

A Baha'i who violates the Covenant is declared a Covenant-breaker only after every effort is made to help that person see the illogicality and error of his actions. The decision whether or not to expel or reinstate (if a Covenant-breaker sincerely repents) is made by the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, subject to the approval of the Universal House of Justice.

The Nature of Covenant-Breaking

Every Baha'i is at liberty, nay is urged, to freely express his opinion and his understanding of the Teachings, but all this is in a totally different category from that of a Baha'i who opposes the clear Teachings of Baha'u'llah or who asserts his own opinion as an authoritative and correct interpretation of the teachings, and attacks or opposes the very Institutions which Baha'u'llah has created to protect His Covenant. When a person declares his acceptance of Baha'u'llah as a Manifestation of God he becomes a party to the Covenant and accepts the totality of His Revelation. If he then turns round and attacks Baha'u'llah or the Central Institution of the Faith he violates the Covenant. If this happens every effort is made to help that person to see the illogicality and error of his actions, but if he persists he must, in accordance with the instructions of Baha'u'llah Himself, be shunned as a Covenant-breaker.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1975, to an individual believer

Now some of the mischief-makers, with many stratagems, are seeking leadership, and in order to reach this position they instill doubts among the friends that

they may cause differences, and that these differences may result in their drawing a party to themselves. But the friends of God must be awake and must know that the scattering of these doubts hath as its motive personal desires and the achievement of leadership.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 214

These [Covenant-breakers] do not doubt the validity of the Covenant, but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition.

[5.14] It is not that they ignore what they do,,they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Star of the West, Vol X, p. 246

Response of the Believers to Covenant-Breaking
One of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 20

The seriousness of Covenant-breaking is that it strikes at the very center and foundation of the unity of mankind. If God were to allow the instrument to be divided and impaired, how then would His purpose be achieved?

...The believers are commanded to shun Covenant-breakers for the same reason as healthy people do not associate with a person suffering from a serious contagious illness. A contagiously sick person cannot catch health from a thousand healthy people, but, on the contrary, he can infect them with his illness. Therefore such a person is quarantined and only those few people qualified to attend him do so.... Then, if he proves adamant he is free to go his way, but the Baha'is must cease to have any association with him until such time as he repents when, of course, he can be accepted back into the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1975, to an individual believer

Baha'u'llah and the Master in many places and very emphatically have told us to shun entirely all Covenant-breakers.... They have also told us, however, to pray for them. These souls are not lost forever. In the Aqdas, Baha'u'llah says that God will forgive Mirza Yahya if he repents. It follows, therefore, that God will forgive any soul if he repents. Most of them don't want to repent, unfortunately....

Also, it has nothing to do with unity in the Cause; if a man cuts a cancer out of his body to preserve his health and very life, no one would suggest that for the sake of "unity" it should be reintroduced into the otherwise healthy organism!
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 22

Meetings at Which Covenant-Breakers Are Present
With regard to avoiding association with declared Covenant-breakers, Shoghi

Effendi says that this does not mean that [5.15] if one or more of these attends a non-Baha'i meeting any Baha'is present should feel compelled to leave the meeting or to refuse to take part in the meeting, especially if that part has been prearranged. Also if in the course of some business transaction it should become necessary to negotiate with one of these people, in order to clear up the business, that is permissible, provided the association is confined to the matter of the business in hand. It is different if one of these people should come to a Baha'i meeting. Then it would become necessary to ask him in a most tactful and dignified way to leave the meeting as Baha'is are forbidden to associate with him.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 16, 1925

Books Written by Covenant-Breakers and Enemies of the Cause
It is better not to read books by Covenant-breakers because they are haters of the Light, sufferers from a spiritual leprosy, so to speak. But books by well meaning and unenlightened enemies of the Cause can be read so as to refute their charges.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 19, 1945

To read the writings of Covenant-breakers is not forbidden to the believers and does not constitute in itself an act of Covenant-breaking. Indeed, some of the Baha'is have the unpleasant duty to read such literature as part of their responsibilities for protecting the Cause of Baha'u'llah. However, the friends are warned in the strongest terms against reading such literature because Covenant-breaking is a spiritual poison and the calumnies and distortions of the truth which the Covenant-breakers give out are such that they can undermine the faith of the believer and plant the seeds of doubt unless he is fore-armed with an unshakable belief in Baha'u'llah and His Covenant and a knowledge of the true facts.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 29, 1974

In reply to your letter of September 20, 1975, the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that the friends should be advised to ignore these books and any similar ones which might be written by enemies of the Faith. There should certainly be no attempt made to destroy or remove such books from libraries. On the other hand, there is no need at all for the friends to acquire them and, indeed the best plan is to ignore them entirely.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 2, 1975,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance , par. 627

[5.16] Mail from Covenant-Breakers
From time to time, Covenant-breakers send material to believers whose names and addresses they have obtained. If the friends receive mail from Covenant-breakers, they are advised to send or hand it, preferably unopened, to their Local Spiritual Assemblies. Alternatively, if recognized and unopened, it may be clearly marked "Return to Sender" and posted.

Covenant-Breakers on the Internet

The Universal House of Justice feels that, when Baha'is are teaching in an online "chat room" and Covenant-breakers intrude upon the discussion, the friends should not feel obliged to sign off simply because Covenant-breakers are present in this virtual space. They should, however, refrain from knowingly engaging the Covenant-breakers in discussions and, in any case, should avoid being drawn into contentious or disputatious situations.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 27, 1997, to an individual believer

Reporting Covenant-Breaking Activities
If a Local Spiritual Assembly learns of any Covenant-breaking activity in its community, it should immediately inform its Auxiliary Board member for Protection and/or the National Spiritual Assembly.

The Auxiliary Boards for Protection
The need to protect the Faith from the attacks of its enemies is not generally appreciated by the friends because such attacks, particularly in the West, have so far been intermittent.

However, we know that these attacks will increase and will become concerted and universal.

The writings of our Faith clearly foreshadow not only an intensification of the machinations of internal enemies, but a rise in the hostility and opposition of its external enemies, whether religious or secular, as our beloved Faith pursues its onward march towards ultimate victory.

Therefore, in the light of the warning of Shoghi Effendi, the Auxiliary Boards for Protection should keep "constantly" a "watchful eye" on those "who are known to be enemies or to have been put out of the Faith," discreetly "investigate" their activities, warn intelligently the friends of the opposition inevitably to come, explain how each crisis in God's Faith has always proved to be a blessing in disguise, prepare them for the "dire contests" which are "destined to range the Army of Light against the forces of darkness," and, when the influence of the enemies spreads and reaches their fold, the members of these Auxiliary Boards should be alert to their schemes to "dampen the zeal and sap the loyalty" of the believers and, by adopting "wise and effective measures," counteract these schemes and arrest the spread of [5.17] their influence.

Above all, the members of the Protection Boards should concentrate on deepening the friends' knowledge of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it, on clearly and frankly answering, in conformity with the teachings, whatever questions may trouble any of the believers, on fostering the spiritual profundity and strength of their Faith and certitude, and on promoting whatever will increase the spirit of loving unity in Baha'i communities.
The Universal House of Justice, in a letter from the International Teaching Center dated October 14, 1976, to the Members of all Continental Boards of Counselors

You are free at any time to refer to the Continental Boards of Counselors and the Auxiliary Board members for protection any matters about which you are not clear involving the security of the Faith in your area and you will always find them willing to assist you in dealing with such problems.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 1, 1979, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Venezuela, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1132

(See also Chapter 1, Section titled "The Auxiliary Board Members")

OPPOSITION

Opposition„Natural and Inevitable Stage in the Unfoldment of the Faith
We cannot believe that as the Movement grows in strength, in authority and in influence, the perplexities and the sufferings it has had to contend with in the past will correspondingly decrease and vanish. Nay, as it grows from strength to strength, the fanatical defendants of the strongholds of orthodoxy, whatever be their denomination, realizing the penetrating influence of this growing Faith, will arise and strain every nerve to extinguish its light and discredit its name....

Dearly beloved friends, upon us devolves the supreme obligation to stand by His side, to fight His battles and to win His victory. May we prove ourselves worthy of this trust.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 123

I am however assured and sustained by the conviction, never dimmed in my mind, that whatsoever comes to pass in the Cause of God, however disquieting in its immediate effects, is fraught with infinite Wisdom and tends ultimately to promote its interests in the world. Indeed, our experiences of the distant past, as well as of recent events, are too numerous and varied to permit of any misgiving [5.18] or doubt as to the truth of this basic principle„a principle which throughout the vicissitudes of our sacred mission in this world we must never disregard or forget.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 27

But after I leave, some people may arise in opposition, heaping persecutions upon you in their bitterness, and in the newspapers there may be articles published against the Cause. Rest ye in the assurance of firmness. Be well poised and serene, remembering that this is only as the harmless twittering of sparrows and that it will soon pass away....

Therefore, my purpose is to warn and strengthen you against accusations, criticisms, revilings and derision in newspaper articles or other publications. Be not disturbed by them. They are the very confirmation of the Cause, the very source of upbuilding to the Movement. May God confirm the day when a score of ministers of the churches may arise and with bared heads cry at the top of their voices that the Baha'is are misguided. I would like to see that day, for that is the time when the Cause of God will spread. Baha'u'llah has pronounced such as these the couriers of the Cause. They will proclaim from pulpits that

the Baha'is are fools, that they are a wicked and unrighteous people, but be ye steadfast and unwavering in the Cause of God. They will spread the message of Baha'u'llah.
'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 428-30

Opposition and the Plan of God
The people of the world have grievously erred, for they fondly imagine that they can exterminate the Cause of God, that they would be able to extinguish His effulgent light, and to put out His heavenly lamps. Vain indeed are their imaginings. I swear by the righteousness of God that the more they endeavor to quench His Light, the brighter will it shine, and the more they strive to smother its flame, the fiercer will it burn. God's invincible Will far transcendeth their devices, and His Purpose is supreme above all human desires, inasmuch as all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth have been called into being through a single holy breeze„ the Word of His command„wafted from His presence, and all shall be brought to naught through but one letter of His. From time immemorial He hath been established upon the seat of His sovereignty and through eternity will He continue to occupy the inaccessible heights of His glory. Every created thing is impotent before the evidences of His invincible might, and all beings fade into utter [5.19] nothingness when confronted with the revelation of His awesome majesty.
Baha'u'llah, in The Baha'i World, Vol. XVIII, p. 13

Sources of Opposition
For let every earnest upholder of the Cause of Baha'u'llah realize that the storms which this struggling Faith of God must needs encounter, as the process of the disintegration of society advances, shall be fiercer than any which it has already experienced. Let him be aware that so soon as the full measure of the stupendous claim of the Faith of Baha'u'llah comes to be recognized by those time-honored and powerful strongholds of orthodoxy, whose deliberate aim is to maintain their stranglehold over the thoughts and consciences of men, this infant Faith will have to contend with enemies more powerful and more insidious than the cruelest torture-mongers and the most fanatical clerics who have afflicted it in the past. What foes may not in the course of the convulsions that shall seize a dying civilization be brought into existence, who will reinforce the indignities which have already been heaped upon it!
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 17

From the record of its tumultuous history...there emerges...the supreme truth that with every fresh outbreak of hostility to the Faith, whether from within or from without, a corresponding measure of outpouring grace, sustaining its defenders and confounding its adversaries, has been providentially released, communicating a fresh impulse to the onward march of the Faith, while this impetus, in its turn, would, through its manifestations, provoke fresh hostility in quarters heretofore unaware of its challenging implications„this increased hostility being accompanied by a still more arresting revelation of Divine Power and a more abundant effusion of celestial grace, which, by enabling the upholders of that Faith to register still more brilliant

victories, would thereby generate issues of still more vital import and raise up still more formidable enemies against a Cause that cannot but, in the end, resolve those issues and crush the resistance of those enemies, through a still more glorious unfoldment of its inherent power.
Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America, pp. 51-52

The Forms Opposition Will Take
We have only to refer to the warnings uttered by 'Abdu'l-Baha in order to realize the extent and character of the forces that are destined to contest with God's holy Faith....

[5.20] Stupendous as is the struggle which His words foreshadow, they also testify to the complete victory which the upholders of the Greatest Name are destined eventually to achieve. Peoples, nations, adherents of divers faiths, will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit. For as the authority with which Baha'u'llah has invested the future Baha'i Commonwealth becomes more and more apparent, the fiercer shall be the challenge which from every quarter will be thrown at the verities it enshrines.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 17-18

Let not, however, the invincible army of Baha'u'llah, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm-centers is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles, be afraid of any criticism that might be directed against it. Let it not be deterred by any condemnation with which the tongue of the slanderer may seek to debase its motives. Let it not recoil before the threatening advance of the forces of fanaticism, of orthodoxy, of corruption, and of prejudice that may be leagued against it. The voice of criticism is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of this Cause. Unpopularity but serves to throw into greater relief the contrast between it and its adversaries; while ostracism is itself the magnetic power that must eventually win over to its camp the most vociferous and inveterate amongst its foes.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 35

How often we seem to forget the clear and repeated warnings of our beloved Master, Who, in particular during the concluding years of His mission on earth, laid stress on the "severe mental tests" that would inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West,„tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 50

The Response of the Believers to Opposition
In this Day whosoever is guided...to gain...the station of recognizing the Source of divine commandments and the Dayspring of His Revelation, hath everlastingly attained unto all good. Having reached this lofty station a twofold obligation resteth upon every soul. One is to be steadfast in the Cause

with such [5.21] steadfastness that were all the peoples of the world to attempt to prevent him from turning to the Source of Revelation, they would be powerless to do so. The other is observance of the divine ordinances which have streamed forth from the wellspring of His heavenly-propelled Pen.
Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 268

For whosoever standeth firm and steadfast in this holy, this glorious, and exalted Revelation, such power shall be given him as to enable him to face and withstand all that is in heaven and on earth. Of this God is Himself a witness.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 330

The friends should, therefore, not assume an attitude of mere resignation in the face of persecutions. They should rather welcome them, and utilize them as means for their own spiritual uplift and also for the promotion of the Cause. As the Faith grows stronger and attracts the serious attention and consideration of the world outside, the friends must expect a similar, if not a greater, increase in the forces of opposition which from every direction, both secular and religious, will be massed to undermine the basis of its existence. The final outcome of such a struggle, which will be surely gigantic, is clear to us believers.... The friends should be confident, and act with the utmost wisdom and moderation, and should particularly abstain from any provocative act. The future is surely theirs.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 24, 1936

As opposition to the Faith, from whatever source it may spring, whatever form it may assume, however violent its outbursts, is admittedly the motive-power that galvanizes, on the one hand, the souls of its valiant defenders, and taps for them, on the other, fresh springs of that Divine and inexhaustible Energy, we who are called upon to represent, defend and promote its interests, should, far from regarding any manifestation of hostility as an evidence of the weakening of the pillars of the Faith, acclaim it as both a God-sent gift and a God-sent opportunity which, if we remain undaunted, we can utilize for the furtherance of His Faith and the routing and complete elimination of its adversaries.
Shoghi Effendi, Messages to America 1932-1946, pp. 51-52

[5.22] The Response of the Assemblies to Opposition
It is incumbent upon them [the Assemblies] to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 38

The matter of refuted attacks and criticisms directed against the Cause through the press is...one which devolves on the National Spiritual Assembly to consider. This body, whether directly or through the agency of its committees, should decide as to the advisability of answering such attacks, and also should carefully examine and pass upon any statements which the friends wish to send to the press to this effect. Only through such supervision and control of all Baha'i press activities can the friends hope to avoid confusion and

misunderstanding....
Shoghi Effendi, August 30, 1939, in The Power of the Covenant, Part III, p. 62

(See also Chapter 12, Section titled "Relationship with the Media")

Triumph of the Cause of God
Whatsoever occurreth in the world of being is light for His loved ones and fire for the people of sedition and strife. Even if all the losses of the world were to be sustained by one of the friends of God, he would still profit thereby, whereas true loss would be born by such as are wayward, ignorant and contemptuous.... The friends of God shall win and profit under all conditions, and shall attain true wealth. In fire they remain cold, and from water they emerge dry. Their affairs are at variance with the affairs of men. Gain is their lot, whatever the deal. To this testifieth every wise one with a discerning eye, and every fair-minded one with a hearing ear.
Baha'u'llah, in Crisis and Victory, pp. 22-23

And now, if you act in accordance with the teachings of Baha'u'llah, you may rest assured that you will be aided and confirmed. You will be rendered victorious in all that you undertake, and all the inhabitants of the earth will be unable to withstand you. You are conquerors, because the power of the Holy Spirit assisteth you. Above and beyond all physical and phenomenal forces, the Holy Spirit itself shall aid you.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Crisis and Victory, p. 25

That the Cause of God should, in the days to come, witness many a challenging hour and pass through critical stages in [5.23] preparation for the glories of its promised ascendancy in the new world has been, time and again, undeniably affirmed by our departed Master, and is abundantly proved to us all by its heroic past and turbulent history.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 60-61

Whatever may befall this infant Faith of God in future decades or in succeeding centuries, whatever the sorrows, dangers and tribulations which the next stage in its world-wide development may engender, from whatever quarter the assaults to be launched by its present or future adversaries may be unleashed against it, however great the reverses and setbacks it may suffer, we, who have been privileged to apprehend, to the degree our finite minds can fathom, the significance of these marvelous phenomena associated with its rise and establishment, can harbor no doubt that what it has already achieved in the first hundred years of its life provides sufficient guarantee that it will continue to forge ahead, capturing loftier heights, tearing down every obstacle, opening up new horizons and winning still mightier victories until its glorious mission, stretching into the dim ranges of time that lie ahead, is totally fulfilled.
Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 412

A Faith born of God and guided by His Divine and all-pervasive spirit cannot but finally triumph and firmly establish itself, no matter how persistent and insidious the forces with which it has to contend.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 24, 1936

SUGGESTED READINGS

The Covenant and Covenant-Breaking

Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'Abdu'l-Baha

Citadel of Faith, Shoghi Effendi

The Promised Day Is Come, Shoghi Effendi

The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters, Shoghi Effendi

The Covenant: A Compilation of Extracts from the Baha'i Writings, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

[524.] Crisis and Victory, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

A Commentary on the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, David Hoffman

The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin and Our Attitude Toward It, National Teaching Committee (See the index for a detailed guide to further study.)

Covenant of Baha'u'llah, Adib Taherzadeh

Eternal Covenant, Lowell Johnson

The Power of the Covenant (India)

(See also the index of The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin and Our Attitude Toward It for a detailed guide to further study)

APPENDIX
USE OF COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

[5.25] Quoting Passages from the Central Figures of the Faith
Spiritual Assemblies and individuals are free to quote in their publications from any of the Writings of the three Central Figures of the Faith or from the writings of the beloved Guardian, whether in the original language or in translation, without obtaining clearance from the copyright holder, unless the copyright holder in the case of a translation is an individual or is a non-Baha'i institution....

The ruling is made to ensure that the Sacred Scriptures of our Faith and the writings of the beloved Guardian may be freely used by the believers; it does not change the existing requirements for review before publication, neither does it relieve Spiritual Assemblies of their responsibility to protect the dignity of the Faith and uphold the proper standard of reverence in the use of its Sacred Scriptures. Thus, if an Assembly sees that one of the friends is making use of any of the Holy Texts in an unbefitting manner, it should remonstrate with him and if necessary, require him to stop doing so.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated September 4,

1981,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance , par 363

Using Musical and Artistic Works
Musical and artistic works are usually covered by copyrights. This includes most special material items (posters, recordings, notecards, films, filmstrips, and so on). Permission should be requested from the publisher or other copyright holder to duplicate or make use of portions of such materials in a separate work.

Using Films, Filmstrips, or Other Visual Materials
Copyrighted Baha'i films, filmstrips, and other visual materials may be used on television programs without written or verbal permission. The source should be properly acknowledged in the credits of the program.

Acknowledging the Author or Source
The author and source of a passage should always be acknowledged, even if permission to reprint the passage is not needed. This applies also to published works with no copyright and to works on which the copyright has expired. Care should be taken to reprint the passage exactly as printed in the original source.

"Fair Use"
If a Local Spiritual Assembly or individual wishes to use a passage from published works other than the Sacred Texts and the writings [5.26] of Shoghi Effendi, permission to do so may be necessary. It should first be determined whether the passage to be used falls within the "Fair use" (i.e., the permissible use) of the copyrighted material within another work.

"Fair use" generally allows:

´ Quotations of excerpts in a review or criticism for purposes of illustration or comment
´ Quotations of short passages in a scholarly or technical work for illustration or clarification of the author's observations
´ Summary of an address or article, with brief quotations, in a news report
´ Incidental and fortuitous reproduction in a broadcast of a work located in the scene or an event being reported
´ Reproduction of a work in legislative or judicial proceedings

The copyright law does not attempt to define the limits of the fair use of copyrighted material, but as an aid in resolving particular fair use cases, four factors are weighed:

´ The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
´ The effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work
´ The purpose and character of the use
´ The nature of the copyrighted work

Information on fair use is from Donald F. Johnston, The Copyright Handbook, 2nd ed., New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1982.

Once it is determined that the use of an excerpt from a copyrighted material falls within the definition of "fair use," permission from the copyright holder need not be obtained. If, however, the use falls outside of the definition of "fair use," permission may be necessary. If there are any doubts as to whether use of a particular work requires permission, it is best to contact the copyright holder and/or the Baha'i Publishing Trust.

Obtaining Permission
The copyright belongs to the author or composer or creator of the work or to whomever he has transferred it (publisher, recording company, film studio, etc.). One of the usual responsibilities of a publisher is to handle permissions„requests from authors, editors, or other publishers to make use of copyrighted material in works of their own creation. The procedure of requesting permission helps ensure that the material will be used in a way that will not be [5.27] damaging to the original work and that it is properly credited in order to protect the copyright.

To expedite requests for permission to use copyrighted materials, be sure that the inquiry is directed to the proper publisher. The publisher's or producer's name can usually be found on the title and/or copyright page of the book or, in the case of non-printed material such as recordings on cassette tape and compact disc, in a prominent location. The request for permission to use the material should include:

´ The specific passages to be used, including:
Author
Title of the work
Page, paragraph, and line numbers of each passage
Any other specific identifying information
´ Complete information on how the material is to be used
´ Information on the number of copies to be made
´ Information on how the copies will be distributed
´ Any other relevant information

6„COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

THREE CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP STATUS

[6.1] Baha'is in Good Standing
Baha'is in possession of their administrative rights may attend Nineteen Day Feasts, vote and be voted for in Baha'i elections, participate in activities reserved for enrolled members in good standing, contribute to the Fund, receive publications intended for Baha'is only, be appointed to service by the institutions of the Faith, be married in the Faith, and enjoy the blessings of Baha'i law.

Baha'is Deprived of Membership Rights
The deprivation of membership rights is a sanction which a National Spiritual

Assembly imposes when it is clear that a Baha'i has knowingly or flagrantly violated certain laws of the Faith or has demonstrated an inability to behave responsibly as a member of the Baha'i community. Shoghi Effendi gave the following explanation about the meaning of this penalty:

Regarding the matter of believers who have been deprived of their voting rights; just as no one should ever be deprived of his voting right lightly, it should, likewise, be realized that to be deprived of it is a grave matter, and involving heavy penalties spiritually. People who have been so deprived should not be permitted to attend any meetings involving the administration of the Cause, such as an election or a Nineteen Day Feast. They can attend the Nine Holy Days; however, they should not be married by Baha'i Law, no money should be accepted from them, they should not be given credentials (which imply a member of the community in good standing), nor should they be used officially as teachers or speakers.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 88

A person whose administrative rights of membership in the Baha'i community have been removed is a Baha'i at heart if he still recognizes [6.2] Baha'u'llah and believes in His Revelation. Since his spiritual commitment is not in question, his continuing Baha'i life can include worship of God through the prayers of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, and observance of the Fast, of the Baha'i Holy Days, and of all the personal and family occasions of the Faith. He has access to the literature of the Faith and, unless specified otherwise by the National Spiritual Assembly, may attend proclamation meetings and Baha'i school sessions that are open to the public. He may subscribe to Brilliant Star and World Order Magazine and other general publications, but he cannot receive The American Baha'i. He cannot have a Baha'i marriage or go on pilgrimage.

At times the National Spiritual Assembly may apply limited sanctions.

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Limited Sanctions," and Section entitled "Meaning of Deprivation of Administrative Rights")

Expulsion for Covenant-Breaking
The suspension of voting and other administrative rights of an individual, always conditional and therefore temporary, can never have such far-reaching implications, since it constitutes merely an administrative sanction; whereas his expulsion or excommunication from the Faith...has far-reaching spiritual implications affecting the very soul of that believer. The former, as already stated, is an administrative sanction, whereas the latter is essentially spiritual, involving not only the particular relationship of a believer to his local or National Assembly, but his very spiritual existence in the Cause. It follows, therefore, that a believer can continue calling himself a Baha'i even though he may cease to be a voting member of the Community. But in case he is excluded from the body of the Cause by an act of the Guardian [now the Universal House of Justice] he ceases to be a believer, and cannot possibly identify himself even nominally with the Faith.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 86

DECLARATION AND ENROLLMENT OF NEW BELIEVERS

(See also Chapter 7, Section entitled "Conditions for Enrollment")

Generally, the enrollment of a new believer involves three steps:

´ Declaration of faith by the new believer
´ Enrollment by a Local Spiritual Assembly, its representative, or an authorized agency
´ Recording of the enrollment by the National Spiritual Assembly through its Office of Management Information Services

[6.3] Declaration
Criteria for Acceptance
The process of becoming a Baha'i is necessarily slow and gradual. The essential is not that the beginner should have a full and detailed knowledge of the Cause, a thing which is obviously impossible in the vast majority of cases, but that he should by an act of his own will, be willing to uphold and follow the truth and guidance set forth in the Teachings, and thus open his heart and mind to the reality of the Manifestation.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #213, November 1948

When an individual accepts Baha'u'llah as the latest Manifestation of God, a declaration card should be completed. On the card, the person is asked to provide his or her name, residential and mailing addresses, telephone number, and birth date, so that the individual can be added to the membership rolls and receive mailings.

There may be occasions when the declarant does not wish to sign the card. If the Local Spiritual Assembly is satisfied that the person sincerely believes in Baha'u'llah, it should send the (unsigned) enrollment card to the National Spiritual Assembly explaining the circumstances and providing the necessary information„name, address, etc.

Enrollment
Once a person has made a declaration of belief in Baha'u'llah by completing and signing a declaration card, the Local Spiritual Assembly (or its representative) ascertains that the declarant is sincere in his declaration of faith in Baha'u'llah and is aware of the Baha'i laws. If the Local Spiritual Assembly is satisfied that the declarant meets the requirements of membership, it approves the enrollment.

Some Assemblies prefer to welcome personally the declarant into the Baha'i community. Others appoint representatives to meet with the new believer.

When the declaration has been accepted, the declaration card should be signed by a representative of the Local Spiritual Assembly and sent to the National Spiritual Assembly (Department of Management Information Services). (It is advisable to make a copy for the local records. As a matter of courtesy, the Assembly may want also to send a copy to the Local Spiritual Assembly where the declarant lives, if it is not the same community as where he or she was

enrolled.)

The new believer then may attend Baha'i functions and is eligible to vote and to be elected to administrative bodies. If an event is held that requires a Baha'i identification card, the local community may vouch for the new Baha'i.

These procedures are used for most enrollments. There are some cases which require special procedures.

[6.4] (See also in this Chapter, Sections entitled "Special Enrollment Procedures" and "Reinstatement from Withdrawal")

Recording the Enrollment
When a signed declaration/enrollment card is received by the National Spiritual Assembly, the name, the address and Baha'i community, the telephone number, and the age of the new believer are recorded on the national membership rolls. A membership card with the Baha'i identification number, a welcoming letter, and introductory materials are sent to the new believer.

Special Enrollment Procedures Southeast Asians
The National Spiritual Assembly has adopted special procedures to expedite the enrollment of Southeast Asian immigrants in order to encourage their immediate participation in the activities of the Baha'i community. These individuals do not need to sign declaration cards and need only to confirm their desire to become Baha'is. Their complete names, birth dates (if available) or ages, and addresses should be forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly (U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office) on a special form obtained from them. If an exact birth date is not known, they should either estimate based upon age or enter the date 01/01/90. The Local Spiritual Assembly or individual enrolling these friends should indicate the ethnic identity of the Southeast Asian friends (i.e., Cambodian, Hmong, Khmer, Laotian, or Vietnamese) and be careful to clarify their first and last names.

Iranian (Persian) Muslims and Other Muslims from the Middle East
Moreover, the House of Justice feels that there are a number of cases in which Iranian Muslims could be considered for enrollment as Baha'is; for example, in cases where the Muslim spouse of a Baha'i has shown his or her interest and sincerity and has never engaged in opposing the Cause. Another example is when an Iranian is [has been] a permanent resident of the United States or Canada [before January 1, 1979] and apparently has no ulterior motives, such as assuming Baha'i membership to resolve his visa problems. Proposed enrollments should be referred to the House of Justice for approval so that, if necessary, the matter can be taken up with the Iranian National Assembly.* Of course, even in the cases cited enrollment cannot always be immediately effected. Consideration must be given to other factors: the reaction of relatives in Iran could be a factor in determining the timeliness of enrolling such persons. In such instances it could be explained to them that although they have accepted the Faith in their hearts and are regarded as Baha'is in belief, their enrollment must be postponed because of the situation in Iran. Meanwhile, the Baha'is [6.5] should maintain friendly contacts with them, and deepen them in

their knowledge of the Faith.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 6, 1983,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, enclosed with a second letter,
dated March 8, 1983, to another National Spiritual Assembly

*Since the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran has been disbanded, Baha'is in Iran are consulted on these matters.

Iranian declarants (any persons from an Iranian background regardless of their immigration status or length of stay in the United States) and other Muslim declarants from the Middle East may participate in administrative functions only after their enrollments are confirmed by the National Spiritual Assembly. Every Iranian seeking to be enrolled as a Baha'i should complete the Persian Enrollment/Registration Information Form in addition to completing the declaration card. This form can be obtained from the Baha'i National Center (Department of Management Information Systems).

In addition to ensuring that the appropriate forms are completed and sent to the Baha'i National Center, the Local Spiritual Assembly should meet with declarants to find out the depth of their understanding of the Faith and the sincerity of their claims. A report of the meeting and the Local Assembly's recommendations for accepting the enrollments should be sent to the Department of Management Information Systems.

The enrollment process is completed when the Baha'i National Center issues an identification card. Except for children of registered members of the American Baha'i community, enrollment of all Persians (including youth) requires confirmation from Baha'is in Iran. Enrollment of Muslims from other Middle Eastern countries requires confirmation from the Universal House of Justice. These communications are coordinated through the Baha'i National Center.

Because communication with the believers in Iran is extremely difficult, the verification process may be lengthy„more than a year in some instances. In the meantime, the Local Assembly may invite these persons to attend those events open to the public and encourage them to continue their study of the Faith.

(See also Chapter 7, Appendix C, Section entitled "Special Circumstances Regarding Teaching Muslims in the West")

Israelis
Whenever an Israeli citizen living in the West, irrespective of his background and religious affiliation, declares his belief and interest in becoming a member of the Baha'i community, he should be informed that the Faith is not taught in Israel and that [6.6] there is no Baha'i community there apart from those who are associated with the Baha'i World Center. He cannot be accepted into the Baha'i community if he is planning to return to Israel to reside there.

If he plans to continue to reside outside Israel, his enrollment can be

accepted, but he will then be subject to the same restrictions about travel to Israel as any other Baha'i, in that he could do so only with the express permission of the Universal House of Justice. In any event, the Universal House of Justice should be informed of any such declaration.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 20, 1994, to several National Spiritual Assemblies

Mainland Chinese
Citizens of the PRC [People's Republic of China] may be accepted as believers without making a written declaration of faith or being officially registered. It should be made clear to them that there is no Baha'i administration in China and therefore at this time Baha'i laws of personal status are not binding, nor are they required to withdraw from membership in other associations. However, they should endeavor to learn about Baha'i laws and principles and should, as a matter of conscience, endeavor to practice these to the best of their ability.

Chinese believers who are citizens of the PRC should be introduced to each other as Baha'is only if they are willing for this to be done. They may participate in the social life of the Baha'i community in a normal manner but not be singled out for undue attention or be subjected to public gaze.

Baha'is from the PRC should be advised of the caution needed regarding teaching the Faith on the Chinese mainland and be asked to observe it for their own protection as well as the future of the Faith there.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Membership records of the Baha'is who are citizens of the PRC are maintained at the World Center at present. Each National Spiritual Assembly is asked to supply the House of Justice with the following information on each of these friends who have accepted the Faith under its jurisdiction: full name of the person in Chinese script, full name in the Roman alphabet, current address, home address in China, date of declaration and occupation.

[6.7] Locally, the records of these new declarants should remain confidential and not be published in any way.
From the Universal House of Justice, enclosed with a letter
dated April 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

For the protection of these new declarants, their records should not be published nor should the fact that citizens of China are involved in Baha'i activities be publicized.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 8, 1987

(See also Chapter 7, Appendix A, Section entitled "Special Circumstances Regarding Teaching Chinese")

Prisoners
A declarant who is a prisoner should be contacted by members of the Local Spiritual Assembly or its representatives, who, if satisfied that the declarant

has sincere intentions, can complete the person's enrollment.

A prisoner, showing sincere faith in the Cause, may be accepted as a Baha'i on the same basis of investigating his qualifications as to belief as any other individual outside prison. Each case should be carefully considered on its own merits. Naturally, a person in confinement cannot be active in any community and administrative work. When he gets out, he becomes part of the community in which he resides.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated August 5, 1955, to a National Spiritual Assembly

You are free to accept declarations of faith from inmates of a prison, but their participation as voting believers can take place only after they have been discharged from prison.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 8, 1969,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 263

(See also Chapter 7, Appendix E, "Special Circumstances Concerning the Teaching and Enrollment of Prisoners")

Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped
The question of mental instability has no bearing upon the acceptance of an enrollment unless it is of such a nature that it affects the ability of the declarant to judge whether or not he believes in Baha'u'llah.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 19, 1981

[6.8] (See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Drug and Alcohol Use," which relates to the enrollment of a person who is mentally handicapped)

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Behavior that Damages the Reputation of the Faith or Causes Disunity")

Persons Whose Behavior Is Contrary to Baha'i Law
The acceptance of a person into the Baha'i community should be based not on whether he is leading an exemplary life, but on whether the Assembly is reasonably certain that he is sincere in his declaration of faith in Baha'u'llah and that he knows of the laws which would affect his personal conduct, so that he does not enter the community under a misapprehension.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 19, 1981

Homosexuality
When a person wishes to join the Faith and it is generally known that he or she has a problem such as drinking, homosexuality, taking drugs, adultery, etc., the individual should be told in a patient and loving way of the Baha'i Teachings on these matters. If it is later discovered that a believer is violating Baha'i standards, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to determine whether the immoral conduct is flagrant and can bring the name of the Faith into disrepute, in which case the Assembly must take action to counsel the believer and require him or her to make every effort to mend his ways.

If the individual fails to rectify his conduct in spite of repeated warnings, sanctions should be imposed. Assemblies, of course, must exercise care not to pry into the private lives of the believers to ensure that they are behaving properly, but should not hesitate to take action in cases of blatant misbehavior.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 11, 1995, to a National Spiritual Assembly

To regard homosexuals with prejudice and disdain would be entirely against the spirit of Baha'i Teachings. The doors are open for all of humanity to enter the Cause of God, irrespective of their present circumstances; this invitation applies to homosexuals as well as to any others who are engaged in practices contrary to the Baha'i Teachings.

Associated with this invitation is the expectation that all believers will make a sincere and persistent effort to eradicate those aspects of their conduct which are not in conformity with Divine [6.9] Law. It is through such adherence to the Baha'i Teachings that a true and enduring unity of the diverse elements of the Baha'i community is achieved and safeguarded.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 11, 1995, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Homosexuality")

Companionate Marriage
The young lady in question should be advised by you or the believer with whom she has been studying that the decision as to whether or not she wishes to enroll in the Faith rests with her and her alone. Your Assembly should not prevent her from enrolling should she so decide, but if she does apply for membership in the community, she obviously should understand that she will be expected to conduct herself as a Baha'i by adjusting her relationship to the man with whom she is presently living. This means that either they must become legally married or she should sever the existing relationship between them.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 4, 1977, to a Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Immorality")

Membership in Secret Organizations, Other Religious Organizations, and Political Involvement
If a person is registered as a member of a church or similar religious organization he should withdraw from it on becoming a Baha'i.

In the case of new believers, it should be made clear to them in the course of teaching them the Faith that one cannot be a Baha'i and also a member of another religious organization. This is simply a matter of straightforwardness and honesty....

You should not formalize the method by which the withdrawal from the church is to be made, and certainly nothing should be added to a declaration form, if you use one. It should be left to the Local Spiritual Assembly which is accepting

the declaration to satisfy itself, as it deems best in each case, that the new believer has already resigned from the church, or does so within a reasonable time of his declaration.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 21, 1968

We fully appreciate the problem, posed in the case of youth who accept Baha'u'llah but whose parents strongly oppose their withdrawal from the Church. In such cases where the [6.10] parents oppose their withdrawal and insistence upon it by the youth would undermine the unity of the family it is permissible for the withdrawal to be postponed until the youth attains the age of 21. This would not, of course, in any way affect his acceptance into the Baha'i community. As you mention, this is the very time at which such a newly-declared believer needs all the deepening and confirmation he can receive.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 6, 1972

There may be occasions when an enrollment must be postponed, as in the case of someone holding a political post, unless that person is able and can, in good conscience, resign from such a post immediately. Other cases may permit acceptance but indicate a need for fixing a time when the individual will be required to conform to certain laws, such as membership in the Masonic Order, church, or other ecclesiastical organizations. Still other times an individual may be encouraged to become better acquainted with the spirit, laws and principles of the Faith before submitting his application. However, the Guardian has cautioned us not to be too rigid in our requirements for accepting new believers or to place hindrances in their way.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 13, 1979, to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, par. 254

(See also Chapter 15, Sections entitled "Political Activity" and "Membership in Other Organizations")

STATUS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children of Non-Baha'i Parents Under 15 Years Old

If the non-Baha'i parents of a youth under 15 permit their child to be a Baha'i, we have no objection whatsoever from the point of view of the Teachings to permitting such a youth to declare as a Baha'i, regardless of age. When he declares his faith in Baha'u'llah, he will then be accepted in the community and be treated as other Baha'i children.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 13, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

15 to 21 Years Old

Declarations of faith from non-Baha'i youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one, whose parents are not Baha'is, may be accepted without the consent of their parents unless this is contrary to the civil law. However, the importance of respect for one's parents must not be forgotten, and such youth may need to be counseled to give heed to their parents' wishes as far as the degree of their activity on behalf of the Faith is concerned, and [6.11] even, if the parents are very antagonistic, to be completely inactive for a time.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 19, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Children of Baha'i Parents

Unlike the children of some other religions, Baha'i children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents. However, the parents are responsible for the upbringing and spiritual welfare of their children, and Spiritual Assemblies have the duty to assist parents, if necessary, in fulfilling these obligations, so that the children will be reared in the light of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and from their earliest years will learn to love God and His Manifestations and to walk in the way of God's Law. It is natural, therefore, to regard the children of Baha'is as Baha'is unless there is a reason to conclude the contrary. It is quite wrong to think of Baha'i children as existing in some sort of spiritual limbo until the age of fifteen at which point they can "become" Baha'is. In the light of this one can conclude the following:

Children born to a Baha'i couple are regarded as Baha'is from the beginning of their lives, and their births should be registered by the Spiritual Assembly.

The birth of a child to a couple, one of whom is a Baha'i, should also be registered unless the non-Baha'i parent objects.

...In the cases of children whose parents become Baha'is, much depends upon the ages and reactions of the children concerned. They will require great love and understanding, and each case must be judged on its own merits. This applies to an added degree, of course, if only one of the parents has accepted the Faith, in which case the attitude of the other parent is an important factor; the aim of the Baha'is should be to foster family unity. The important thing is that the children, whether registered as Baha'is or not, should be made to feel welcome at Baha'i children's classes and other community gatherings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 19, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 9, Sections entitled "Attendance and Participation" and "Behavior of Children.")

Registration Cards for Children

Baha'i parents may complete a Baha'i Registration card for each child and forward it to the Baha'i National Center. (Registration cards can be obtained from the Department of Management Information Services.) When the card is received, the child will be [6.12] assigned a Baha'i identification number and the child's name will be added to the national computer records. After the child's name has been recorded on the computer, the child will receive an acknowledgment letter in care of the parents. The letter will include the child's Baha'i identification number, which the parents should refer to when making address changes for the family.

Parents may register their children at birth or any time before they reach the age of 15. After reaching the age of 15, any child who has not been registered

must complete a Baha'i Declaration card to have their name entered on the membership rolls.

Possible Circumstances for Not Registering Children
It is within the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly to determine whether children should be registered as Baha'is in cases where one parent is not a Baha'i. Although children of Baha'i parents, under age 15, are generally considered Baha'is, there may be circumstances in which they should not be registered as such, and this is also left to your discretion. Local Spiritual Assemblies should help by advising the parents to consider it one of their primary obligations to raise their children in a spirit of love and dedication towards the Faith.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 3, 1976

Registration and Declaration
In answer to your letter...concerning the registration of children of Baha'i parents the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that at the present time it prefers to leave the details of such matters to the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly. One National Assembly, for example, sends a very nice letter to each Baha'i child in its community on the occasion of its fifteenth birthday (unless, of course, it has reason to doubt that the child in question is a Baha'i), explaining the meaning of attaining the age of maturity, and extending the good wishes of the Assembly for his or her future services to the Cause. This does not require an active response from every child but does provide each with an opportunity to make his or her position clear if desired.

The House of Justice points out that the Assembly must wisely steer a course between seeming to doubt the faith of a child who has been brought up as a devout Baha'i on the one hand, and seeming to compel a child to be a member of the Baha'i community against his will, on the other.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 5, 1978

[6.13] Although the children of Baha'i parents are considered to be Baha'is, there is no objection at the present time, for purposes of keeping a correct census, and also ascertaining whether the young people are, sincerely, believers, and willing to do their share in service to the Faith, to asking them to make a declaration of their intention, at the age of fifteen or so. Originally the Guardian understands this was adopted in America to enable young Baha'i men to make certain arrangements in connection with their application for non-combatant status, upon their attaining the age of military service. There is really nothing about it in the Teachings or in the Administration. Your Assembly is free to do as it pleases in this matter.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated June 17, 1954, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The way in which Baha'i children should be registered upon reaching the age of fifteen is within the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly; there is

no objection to using for this purpose the general enrollment card, if such a card is adopted, or a new and separate one specially for Baha'i children attaining the age of fifteen. It is important, however, that whatever method of enrollment is used or card adopted, it is clear to such children that they had been Baha'is up to that time, and that on attaining the age of spiritual maturity they are reaffirming their belief in Baha'u'llah.

The form and wording of an enrollment or registration card is also within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 28, 1975

Reaching the Age of Maturity„Fifteen
Upon attaining the age of fifteen a child becomes spiritually mature and is responsible for stating on his own behalf whether or not he wishes to remain a member of the Baha'i community. If he does not then reaffirm his faith, he must be treated, administratively, as a non-Baha'i.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 12, 1975

Fifteen is the age at which a child attains spiritual maturity, and thus it is at the age of fifteen that a Baha'i child assumes the responsibility for obeying such laws as those of fasting and prayer, and for affirming of his own volition his faith in Baha'u'llah.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 19, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[6.14] It may happen that a Baha'i child, on reaching the age of fifteen, is not entirely sure in his own mind. This can well happen if one of the parents is not a Baha'i or if the parents have accepted the Faith not long before. In such a case the Assembly should not assume automatically that he is not a Baha'i. If the youth wishes to attend Feasts and is content to continue to be regarded as a Baha'i as he was when a child, this should be permitted, but in the process of deepening his understanding of the Faith his parents and the Assembly should explain to him that it is his responsibility to soon make his position clear.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 19, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Registered Youth Contacted at Age Fifteen
In the past, a youth was required to sign a declaration card upon reaching the age of fifteen. Now when a Baha'i youth who has been previously registered reaches the age of fifteen, the National Assembly sends a loving letter along with a membership card and explains what it means to reach the age of maturity. The letter is sent about three months before the youth's fifteenth birthday, and it is not required that the youth complete a Baha'i Declaration card since they have previously been registered as a Baha'i child.

While the procedures do not require an active response, in accepting the membership card, the youth affirms his belief in Baha'u'llah. It is important to emphasize that a Baha'i child is not compelled to become a Baha'i and is

free to leave the Faith at any time. "If any Baha'i finds that he does not believe in the Faith," the Universal House of Justice has stated, "he is free to leave it..., and no stigma at all attaches to such an action."

The National Assembly hopes that each Local Assembly will celebrate this occasion with the youth and take the opportunity to nurture their understanding of the significance of being a Baha'i, of reaching the age of spiritual maturity and of obeying the laws of the Faith.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Withdrawal from and Reinstatement of Membership")

BAHA'I CREDENTIALS

All Baha'is, adult and youth, should carry current identification cards issued by the National Spiritual Assembly. The cards identify them as members of the Baha'i Faith in good standing and entitle them to attend Nineteen Day Feasts, Baha'i conferences, national and state conventions, and other meetings which are for Baha'is only.

[6.15] Checking Credentials

The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for checking the credentials of Baha'is from other localities who wish to participate in community activities restricted to Baha'is.

Checking visitors" membership cards protects the community from those who have had their membership revoked or from anyone who may be hostile toward the Faith. Checking credentials will become increasingly important as the Faith expands and as it begins to encounter opposition. Shoghi Effendi wrote:

...As the Movement grows in prestige, fame and influence, as the ambitions, malice and ill-will of strangers and enemies correspondingly wax greater, it becomes increasingly important for every individual and Spiritual Assembly to be on their guard lest they fall innocent victims of the evil designs of the malevolent, the self-seeking and greedy.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 102

Since it sometimes happens that unscrupulous individuals will attempt to take advantage of the kindness and hospitality of the Baha'i community, it is especially important that the Local Spiritual Assembly ask to see the Baha'i identification of strangers claiming to be Baha'is and politely but firmly ask them to leave should they be unable to produce current Baha'i credentials.

Visitors from other countries who do not have current credentials must have their Baha'i status confirmed through the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States (Department of Management Information Services).

Baha'i credentials can only be processed through the Baha'i National Center. Local Spiritual Assemblies are not authorized to give temporary or permanent identification cards or credentials to Baha'is.

(See also Chapter 12, Section entitled "Contact with Government Officials")

Transfer of Membership

Baha'is from other countries who plan to remain in the United States for any length of time must send their current credentials to the National Spiritual Assembly. Current credentials are considered to be a letter or identification card not more than one year old issued by the former National Spiritual Assembly. The National Assembly will retain the credentials and provide them with U.S. Baha'i credentials.

If Baha'is do not have current credentials, they should contact their former National Spiritual Assembly and request the transfer of their Baha'i membership to the American Baha'i community. They [6.16] should include their former and current addresses. When the transfer is complete, they will be notified.

Although a Local Spiritual Assembly should not write to the former National Spiritual Assembly on behalf of the Baha'is, an Assembly may assist them with this procedure.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Special Membership Transfer Procedures")

Special Membership
Transfer Procedures
Transfer of Southeast Asians

The National Spiritual Assembly has adopted special procedures to expedite the transfer of membership of Southeast Asian immigrants in order to encourage their participation in the activities of the Baha'i community. Therefore, unlike transfers from other countries, newly-arrived Baha'i immigrants from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia need only indicate that they are Baha'is. They may be invited to participate in the activities of their new community regardless of whether they possess Baha'i credentials. Their complete names, birth dates (if available) or ages, and addresses should be forwarded to the National Spiritual Assembly (Attn: U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office) on a special form obtained from them. If an exact birth date is not known, they should either estimate based upon age or enter the date 01/01/90. The Local Spiritual Assembly or individual enrolling these friends should indicate the ethnic identity of the Southeast Asian friends (i.e., Cambodian, Hmong, Khmer, Laotian, or Vietnamese) and be careful to clarify their first and last names.

Transfer of Persians

Note: The term Persian refers to anyone of Persian heritage or anyone with a Persian surname.

Current procedures for transferring the membership of Persian Baha'is to the United States Baha'i community are as follows:

´ Transfers Must Be Processed Through the Baha'i National Center

Transfer of membership of Baha'is who arrive in this country from abroad can only be processed by the Baha'i National Center (Department of Management Information Services). Local Spiritual Assemblies are not authorized to make such transfers.

´ Those With Current Credentials

Persians holding current credentials (less than one year old) from another National Spiritual Assembly may participate in administrative functions such as the Nineteen Day Feast while their transfers to this country are being completed. However, [6.17] they are not eligible to participate in elections until their transfers have been completed.

´ Those Without Current Credentials

According to instructions from the Universal House of Justice, Persian Baha'is who have left Iran since the Revolution [January 1979] and do not have current credentials may not be registered before their Baha'i membership is confirmed by the Baha'is in Iran. Although the Baha'i institutions in Iran have been disbanded, a procedure has been established for verification of Baha'i membership.

The first step in the process is the filling out of a Persian Baha'i Membership Questionnaire, which may be obtained from the Department of Management Information Services.

Persians transferring their membership should provide the National Center with specific information about their place of residence in Iran; their date and place of birth; the names and telephone numbers or addresses of their friends or relatives in Iran; and the location number of the Nineteen Day Feast they last attended or the names of the Feast officers. This information is necessary for the friends in Iran to verify their Baha'i membership.

After the form is filled out, the newly-arrived Persian Baha'is are advised to ask their friends and relatives in Iran to introduce them. Because communication with the Baha'is in Iran is often difficult, the verification process may be lengthy„more than a year in some instances.

Those without valid current credentials may participate only in those functions open to non-Baha'is.

´ Former Members of the United States Baha'i Community

´ Former members of the United States Baha'i community who have been out of the country for more than six months need to be transferred officially back in. Iranian Baha'is who were members of the American Baha'i community but have traveled to Iran, even for a short time, are subject to the verification process.

´ Temporary Credentials, Introductory Letters

´ Local Assemblies are not to issue temporary identification cards for newly-arrived believers, nor should they write letters introducing them as Baha'is in good standing to immigration officials or other local, state, or Federal officials. All requests [6.18] from Iranian Baha'is for assistance with immigration should be forwarded to the Baha'i National Center (Attn: Office of Persian/American Affairs).

Local Assemblies and Baha'i groups should lovingly explain to the newly-arrived Persian Baha'is the need for complying with the instructions of the Universal House of Justice, and should enforce these instructions firmly and uniformly.

WITHDRAWAL FROM AND REINSTATEMENT OF MEMBERSHIP

Handling Requests for Withdrawal

The objective in handling withdrawal requests is not merely to clarify individuals" Baha'i status or to "clean up the membership list." Rather, the aim is to draw ambivalent Baha'is closer to the Faith. Often the most effective means to assist those who are wavering in their faith or having severe difficulties is to invite them to meet with the Assembly, or to send a mature and deepened believer to meet with them and discuss the nature of their belief and any other pertinent questions. Dealing with the matter entirely through correspondence or over the phone generally proves unhelpful and should be avoided when possible.

Upon investigation an Assembly may learn that the person believes in Baha'u'llah but does not wish to participate in the affairs of the Baha'i community. If this is the case, his withdrawal should not be accepted, yet his wish not to participate in community life should be honored. The Assembly should strive to nurture each person and draw him closer to the Baha'i community and to make each feel he is a welcomed and valued member. If, however, the investigation reveals that he does not believe in Baha'u'llah and His Revelation, then he is free to withdraw from the Faith and such a withdrawal should be accepted.

When reporting a withdrawal case to the National Spiritual Assembly, the Local Spiritual Assembly should include the person's Baha'i identification number, give a brief but complete summary of the case, and include its recommendations and the reasons for them. The National Spiritual Assembly will then make the decision about whether to accept the withdrawal.

The National Spiritual Assembly at times receives letters directly from persons expressing a desire to leave the Faith. If they recant their faith, the National Spiritual Assembly will honor the requests to withdraw from Baha'i membership. Likewise, if the person states that they have joined another Faith, the National Spiritual Assembly will accept their withdrawal since their action indicates that they no longer believe in Baha'u'llah. If no reasons are given and the persons live within the jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly will be asked for its comments and possible [6.19] assistance in resolving whatever problems may have prompted the request. If they live in an area without a Local Spiritual Assembly, the National Spiritual Assembly may ask a nearby Assembly to handle the case.

Meaning of Withdrawal

Withdrawal from membership in the Baha'i community means that the individual no longer believes in Baha'u'llah or His Revelation. It is not the same as being a Covenant-breaker, and the person should not be avoided as one would avoid a Covenant-breaker. In fact, individuals often become believers again later and

are reinstated.

Criteria for Withdrawal
Should one who is a member of the Baha'i Community lose his faith or find that he had not really believed from the beginning he would notify the Spiritual Assembly of his withdrawal from the Community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 15, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a person makes it quite clear that they do not wish to be considered an active member of the Baha'i Community and be affiliated with it and exert their voting right, then their name should be removed from the voting list; but if a person considers himself or herself a Baha'i, and for various reasons is not able to be active in the affairs of the Community, then they should certainly not be removed from our voting list....
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 2, 1951,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 300

Any member of the Baha'i Community who finds that he does not believe in Baha'u'llah and His Revelation is free to withdraw from the Faith and such a withdrawal should be accepted. But a Baha'i who continues to believe in Baha'u'llah cannot withdraw from the Baha'i Community. While he believes in this Revelation he is subject to its laws. Therefore your National Spiritual Assembly was not correct in accepting Mr....'s withdrawal from the Faith. In his very letter of withdrawal Mr....reaffirmed his belief in the Faith. You should, therefore, immediately reinstate him and so inform him. Of course, he may well wish to remain inactive, and if so his wish should be respected, but he should know that he is a member of the Baha'i community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 8, 1970

[6.20] (See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Withdrawing to Avoid Baha'i Law")

With regard to those who do not consider themselves Baha'is on the basis of the argument that they signed the Declaration Card without actually knowing the significance of what they were doing, you should determine who these people are. You should then deepen their knowledge of the Faith. If they feel, after receiving sufficient information, that they do not wish to be Baha'i, then their names should be removed from the Baha'i membership list.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 23, 1985,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 2035

Inactivity Not a Basis for Removal from Membership
People who are inactive should not automatically be removed from the voting list....

It is very discouraging to find inactive and unresponsive believers; on the other hand we must always realize that some souls are weak and immature and not capable of carrying on an active administrative burden. They need

encouragement, the love of their fellow Baha'is and assistance. To blame them for not doing more for the Cause is useless and they may actually have a very firm belief in Baha'u'llah which with care could be fanned into flame.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 25, 1947, to an individual believer

If believers become inactive it is naturally desirable that the Local Spiritual Assemblies attempt to maintain contact with them and encourage them to become active unless, of course, it is obvious that their personal situation precludes such activity. For example, a Baha'i who is married to a non-Baha'i may well have to limit his activities to some degree in order to maintain the unity of his family.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 7, 1975

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Community Membership List")

Withdrawing to Avoid Baha'i Law
If a believer who did not like a particular law were to be permitted to leave the community to break the law, and then rejoin with impunity, this would make a mockery of the Law of God.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 15, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

A believer cannot escape administrative expulsion by the ruse of resigning from the Faith in order to break its law with impunity. However, the Assembly should be satisfied that there was [6.21] indeed such an ulterior motive behind the withdrawal. A believer's record of inactivity and his general attitude to the Faith may well lead the Assembly to conclude that his withdrawal was bona fide...and in such a case the withdrawal may be accepted.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

We note the case in which believers have evidently attempted to withdraw from the Faith in an effort to evade the Baha'i law requiring consent of parents. This, of course, should not be permitted and such believers are subject to administrative expulsion (i.e. loss of voting rights) on the same basis as if they had not made that attempt.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 7, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Reinstatement from Withdrawal
The reinstatement of membership of persons who have withdrawn from the Faith does not require the signing of a Baha'i Declaration card. Rather, those wishing to be reinstated should apply directly or through a Local Spiritual Assembly to the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Assembly should determine that the person accept the station of Baha'u'llah and is willing to assume the responsibilities of Baha'i membership, and if that is the case, forward this information with a request for reinstatement to the National Assembly. If the request is accepted, the person is reinstated under their original Baha'i identification number.

COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

Register of Vital Statistics
Marriages, Births, Burials

Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are embryonic Local Houses of Justice, should develop as rallying centers of the community. They must concern themselves not only with teaching the Faith, with the development of the Baha'i way of life and with the proper organization of the Baha'i activities of their communities, but also with those crucial events which profoundly affect the life of all human beings: birth, marriage, and death. When a Baha'i has a child it is a matter of joy to the whole local community as well as to the couple, and each Local Spiritual Assembly should be encouraged to keep a register of such births, issuing a birth certificate to the parents. Such a practice will foster the consolidation of the community and of the Assembly itself. Even if only one of the parents is a Baha'i, the Assembly could register the birth of the child, and upon application of the Baha'i parent issue the certificate.

...Each Assembly...must conscientiously carry out its responsibilities in connection with the...recording of Baha'i [6.22] marriages in a register kept for this purpose, and the issuing of Baha'i marriage certificates....

In some parts of the world, if Local Spiritual Assemblies fail to carry out these sacred duties some believers might gradually drift away from the Faith and even pay dues to churches or other religious organizations to ensure that, when they require to register the birth of a child, to solemnize a marriage or to have a funeral service, there will be a religious institution ready to perform the necessary services. Conversely, when Local Assemblies have arisen to carry out these responsibilities, the believers have acquired a sense of security and solidarity, and have become confident that in such matters they can rely upon the agencies of the World Order of Baha'u'llah.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 17, 1981, to All National Spiritual Assemblies

Marriage and birth certificates are available for a small fee from the Management Information Services department at the Baha'i National Center.

Community Membership List

A list of Baha'is in the United States is maintained and updated by the National Spiritual Assembly. Twice a year, the National Spiritual Assembly (through its Management Information Services department) sends a revised Community Membership List generated from the national listing to all Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Three general categories appear on each list:

´ Believers with Known Addresses
Mail is deliverable at the listed address
´ Believers Who Have Had Their Mail Returned
Mail does not reach the addressee and is returned to the post office. The community should try to verify the addresses of these believers.

´ Believers Deprived of Their Administrative Rights, Institutionalized, or Imprisoned

Previously, the names of Baha'is who were deprived of their administrative rights, institutionalized, or imprisoned were removed from the local membership list. Since those people are still members of the Baha'i Faith, however, their names are now retained on the local list with notations about their personal status.

[6.23] Names that do not appear:

´ Verified Address Unknown

If the community has verified that a person does not live at the last known address, and no forwarding information is available, the name is removed from the local membership list; however, the person's name is retained on the national membership rolls.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Inactivity Not a Basis for Removal from Membership'; Chapter 15, Section entitled "Restoration of Administrative Rights")

Suggestions for Verifying Addresses of Mail-Returns
See the Appendix

Use of Baha'i Directories and Membership Lists
Mailing lists and directories are to be used for the work of the Faith only and may not be used for promotional or advertising purposes, or for business solicitation. Baha'is provide their addresses and personal information to the National Spiritual Assembly with the understanding that the information they provide will be kept confidential. The National Spiritual Assembly is obligated to protect the privacy of those who do not wish to receive unauthorized mail.

Creation of Mailing Lists for Businesses
Businesses that sell Baha'i specialty items are required to compile their own mailing lists. Baha'is who have expressed an interest in receiving mail from a particular business may be added to the list. In addition, Baha'i business owners are free to contact other businesses owned by Baha'is to use or purchase their mailing lists.

Destruction of Obsolete Lists
The mailing lists must be kept secure to prevent them from falling into the hands of Covenant-breakers or enemies of the Faith. Obsolete lists should be shredded or burned.

Sharing Community Lists with Other Communities
It is left to the discretion of each Assembly whether it wishes to share its membership lists with other Baha'i institutions. (The lists should only be used to conduct official Baha'i business.) The lists should not, however, be given to individual Baha'is outside of the community without the prior consent of each community member, as the names and addresses of the Baha'is are considered confidential.

APPENDIX
SUGGESTIONS FOR VERIFYING ADDRESSES OF MAIL RETURNS

[6.24] Check a recent telephone book. If asked, a directory assistance operator will sometimes give out addresses of those whose telephone number is listed. If a correct address is found, visit, write, or call the person to verify the information.

If there is no phone listing, visit the last known address. Ask neighbors or other local Baha'is whether they have any information. If the person still lives there but is not at home, call or write later.

Send a letter or a postcard to the last known address with a notation "Address Correction Requested" on the front. Make sure your return address also appears on the envelope. If the person has moved, the Post Office will return the letter with the new address noted on it. A small fee will be charged.

Addresses can be sought under the Freedom of Information Act. Place a request at the Post Office. The address will be unobtainable if the person moved more than eighteen months before or did not file a change of address.

Updated address information should be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly (Attn: Management Information Services) on the Baha'i Membership Data Report (BMDR). If a person cannot be located, all efforts to find him should be documented and sent with the BMDR. If it is decided that a reasonable search has been made, the name will be taken off the community membership list and put into the "Verified Address Unknown" file. Then, the name can be dropped from the community's voting list.

(See also Chapter 16, Section entitled "Locating Parents")

7„TEACHING AND CONSOLIDATION

THREE ASPECTS OF TEACHING

The House of Justice...has instructed us to point out that proclamation, expansion, and consolidation are really three different aspects of teaching which to some degree merge into one another and therefore it is largely for each National Spiritual Assembly to decide how it will allocate these different aspects to committees in light of the volume of the work and the condition in each country.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 27, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Proclamation
Worldwide proclamation, the unknown sea on which we must soon sail, will add another dimension to our work, a dimension which will, as it develops, complement and reinforce the twin processes of expansion and consolidation. This pattern of teaching, emerging so soon after the completion of the framework of the Administrative Order, may well be the means of advancing the vital work of consolidation and of rendering more effective the teaching wisdom which has been gained in a hundred years, and more particularly since the

beloved Guardian called us to systematic and planned activity. Therefore in those countries where we are free to publicize our religion, this activity must become part of our regular work, included in budgets, assigned to national and local committees for study and implementation and above all for coordination with the programs operating to achieve the goals of the Nine Year Plan. Every effort of proclamation must be sustained by teaching, particularly locally, where public announcements should be related to such efforts. This coordination is essential, for nothing will be [7.2] more disheartening than for thousands to hear of the Faith and have nowhere to turn for further information.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 112-113

Proclamation comprises a number of activities, of which publicity is only one.... One of the most important duties of each national spiritual assembly is to acquaint leaders of thought and prominent men and women in its country with the fundamental aims, the history, and the present status and achievements of the Cause.

...Another aspect of proclamation is a series of teaching programs designed to reach every stratum of human society„programs that should be pursued diligently and wisely, using every available resource.

Publicity itself should be well conceived, dignified, and reverent. A flamboyant approach which may succeed in drawing much initial attention to the Cause may ultimately prove to have produced a revulsion which would require great effort to overcome....

In all proclamation activities, follow-up is of supreme importance. Proclamation, expansion, and consolidation are mutually helpful activities which must be carefully interrelated. In some places it is desirable to open a teaching campaign with publicity„in others it is wiser to establish first a solid local community before publicizing the Faith or encouraging contacts with prominent people. Here, again, wisdom is needed.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 117-18

The International Teaching Center has concluded that the Baha'i institutions in...seem to have been placing too much reliance on large, expensive projects, involving a great deal of successful public relations and proclamation. These are, in their own way, very useful activities, but it must be realized that they cannot be expected to produce large numbers of new believers. The key to the conversion of people to the Faith is the action of the individual Baha'i conveying the spark of faith to individual seekers, answering their questions and deepening their understanding of the teachings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 9, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Relationship with the Media")

[7.3] Expansion
The Baha'i world needs to foster a united clarity of vision for the expansion of the Cause and all its agencies, and a wide range of activities suited to the

differing conditions of both the general population and the individual Baha'is. We therefore urge the friends, and especially the Assemblies, to study this compilation [Promoting Entry by Troops], to understand the coherence of statements, and to use its counsels to lend a renewed impetus to the spread of the Faith and the establishment of the institutions of the Cause of God.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries through cultivating their external relations.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, d
ated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

In North America, there are opportunities for the advancement of the process of entry by troops, the like of which presently exist in no other place on earth. Three unique characteristics combine to give rise to this condition: the unparalleled strength of your local communities, particularly evident in the activity of your Local Spiritual Assemblies and in the consecration of the Baha'i youth; the positive impression of the Faith which has been conveyed, not only to the generality of the population, but also to leaders of thought and people of influence; and the composition of your nations, which have welcomed to their shores immigrants, students and refugees from all areas of the planet, drawn from all the major racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds of humanity. You, who live in a continent described by 'Abdu'l-Baha as "the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, the home of the righteous, and the gathering-place of [7.4] the free," are called upon to take full advantage of these favorable circumstances.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Followers of Baha'u'llah in North America

The stage is set for universal, rapid and massive growth of the Cause of God. The immediate and basic challenge is pursuit of the goals of the Six Year Plan [1986-1992], the preliminary stages of which have already been initiated. The all-important teaching work must be imaginatively, persistently and sacrificially continued, ensuring the enrollment of ever larger numbers who will provide the energy, the resources and spiritual force to enable the beloved Cause to worthily play its part in the redemption of mankind.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1987, to the Baha'is of the World

The paramount goal of the teaching work at the present time is to carry the message of Baha'u'llah to every stratum of human society and every walk of life. An eager response to the teachings will often be found in the most unexpected quarters, and any such response should be quickly followed up, for success in a fertile area awakens a response in those who were at first uninterested.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 31, 1967, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

In many lands...there is an eager receptivity for the teachings of the Faith. The challenge for the Baha'is is to provide these thousands of seeking souls, as swiftly as possible, with the spiritual food that they crave, to enlist them under the banner of Baha'u'llah, to nurture them in the way of life He has revealed, and to guide them to elect Local Spiritual Assemblies which, as they begin to function strongly, will unite the friends in firmly consolidated Baha'i communities and become beacons of guidance and havens of refuge to mankind.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1979, to the Baha'is of the World

Consolidation
Great care must be taken that when the heart of the individual is touched by the power of Baha'u'llah's Message and the declarant has expressed his desire to embrace the Faith, the process of deepening be followed almost immediately. Deepening the knowledge of the new believer in the verities of the Faith is the most vital part of teaching; but deepening is not merely the imparting of knowledge,,it requires also to imbue the soul of the person with [7.5] the love of Baha'u'llah so that his faith may grow day by day and he becomes a steadfast believer.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 30, 1993, to an individual believer

Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resources necessary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its interests.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1993, to the Baha'is of the World

While the way in which the teaching work is organized is a matter for each National Spiritual Assembly to determine, the Universal House of Justice stresses the need for "an efficient teaching structur" to ensure that "the tasks are carried out with dispatch and in accordance with the administrative principles of our Faith." It further states that the work of consolidation, which is "an essential and inseparable element of teaching," must be "prompt, thorough and continuing." Such an integrated approach to the expansion of the

Cause not only increases the human and financial resources of the Baha'i community, it also helps to avoid such problems as the "inoculation" of believers against the Faith, resulting from a combination of inadequate teaching and careless consolidation.
From a statement prepared by the Research Department on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October, 1993, in the compilation Promoting Entry by Troops

Consolidation is as vital a part of the teaching work as expansion. It is that aspect of teaching which assists the believers to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Teachings, and fans the flame of their devotion to Baha'u'llah and His Cause, so that they will, of their own volition, continue the process of their spiritual development, promote the teaching work, and strengthen the functioning of their administrative institutions. Proper consolidation is essential to the preservation of the spiritual health of the community, to the protection of its interests, to the upholding of its [7.6] good name, and ultimately to the continuation of the work of expansion itself.

...Activities falling into this category include the organization of circuits of traveling teachers skilled in consolidation work; the holding of summer and winter schools, weekend institutes and conferences; the initiation and operation of tutorial schools; the dissemination of Baha'i literature and the encouragement of its study by the friends; and the organization of special courses and institutes for Local Spiritual Assembly members....

Consolidation activities promote the individual spiritual development of the friends, help to unite and strengthen Baha'i community life, establish new social patterns for the friends, and stimulate the teaching work.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 17, 1981

Consolidation must comprise not only the establishment of Baha'i administrative institutions, but a true deepening in the fundamental verities of the Cause and in its spiritual principles, understanding of its prime purpose in the establishment of the unity of mankind, instruction in its standards of behavior in all aspects of private and public life, in the particular practice of Baha'i life in such things as daily prayer, education of children, observance of the laws of Baha'i marriage, abstention from politics, the obligation to contribute to the Fund, the importance of the Nineteen Day Feast, and opportunity to acquire a sound knowledge of the present-day practice of Baha'i administration.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 78

True consolidation is to ensure that the love of Baha'u'llah and devotion to His Faith are firmly rooted in the hearts of the believers; this is the essential foundation for the subsequent addition of increased knowledge of the teachings and the development of the Baha'i way of life.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 3, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation prepared by the International Teaching Center

To give people this glorious Message and then leave them in the lurch, produces

disappointment and disillusionment, so that, when it does become possible to carry out properly planned teaching in that area, the teachers may well find the people resistant to the Message. The first teacher who was careless of consolidation, instead of planting and nourishing the seeds of faith has, in fact [7.7] "inoculated" the people against the Divine Message and made subsequent teaching very much harder.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 16, 1981, to all Continental Pioneer Committees

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "The Importance of Consolidation";
Chapter 8, Section entitled "How to Develop a Distinctive Community Life")

Balancing Expansion and Consolidation
By a wise allocation of resources and the energetic pursuit of simultaneous plans of expansion, deepening and consolidation, the process of entry by troops should bring about a rapidly increasing supply of active believers, soundly based local communities, and steadily evolving local and national Baha'i institutions.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 9, 1993, to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in the compilation Promoting Entry by Troops

Expansion and consolidation are twin processes that must go hand in hand. The friends must not stop expansion in the name of consolidation. Deepening the newly enrolled believers generates tremendous stimulus which results in further expansion. The enrollment of new believers, on the other hand, creates a new spirit in the community and provides additional potential manpower that will reinforce the consolidation work.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 33

Your attention must be focused on the most urgent requirements of the moment, that of keeping the proper balance between winning new converts and deepening the knowledge of the believers in the history and fundamentals of the Faith.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 15, 1968,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation
prepared by the International Teaching Center

Simultaneous and coequal with this vast, ordered, and ever-growing teaching effort, the work of consolidation must go hand in hand. In fact these two processes must be regarded as inseparable.... While the work of teaching inevitably goes first, to pursue it alone without consolidation would leave the community unprepared to receive the masses who must sooner or later respond to the life-giving message of the Cause. The guidance of our beloved Guardian in this matter is, as ever, clear and unambiguous: "Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Baha'i institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the [7.8] roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development. From this vital, this ever-present need attention must, at no time, be diverted, nor must it be, under any circumstances, neglected, or subordinated to the no less vital and urgent task of ensuring the outer expansion of Baha'i administrative institutions." A

proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development must, from now on, as we enter the era of large-scale conversion, be maintained by the Baha'i community.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 77-78

No Proselytizing
It is true that Baha'u'llah lays on every Baha'i the duty to teach His Faith. At the same time, however, we are forbidden to proselytize, so it is important for all the believers to understand the difference between teaching and proselytizing. It is a significant difference and, in some countries where teaching a religion is permitted, but proselytizing is forbidden, the distinction is made in the law of the land. Proselytizing implies bringing undue pressure to bear upon someone to change his Faith. It is also usually understood to imply the making of threats or the offering of material benefits as an inducement to conversion. In some countries mission schools or hospitals, for all the good they do, are regarded with suspicion and even aversion by the local authorities because they are considered to be material inducements to conversion and hence instruments of proselytization.

Baha'u'llah, in The Hidden Words, says: "O Son of Dust! The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth a seeker, and the lover who crieth not out from the depths of his heart until he gazeth upon the beauty of his beloved...," and on page 55 of The Advent of Divine Justice, a letter which is primarily directed towards exhorting the friends to fulfill their responsibilities in teaching the Faith, Shoghi Effendi writes: "Care, however, should, at all times, be exercised, lest in their eagerness to further the international interests of the Faith they frustrate their purpose, and turn away, through any act that might be misconstrued as an attempt to proselytize and bring undue pressure upon them, those whom they wish to win over to their Cause." Some Baha'is sometimes overstep the proper bounds, but this does not alter the clear principle.

The responsibility of the Baha'is to teach the Faith is very great. The contraction of the world and the onward rush of events require us to seize every chance open to us to touch the hearts and minds [7.9] of our fellow men. The Message of Baha'u'llah is God's guidance for mankind to overcome the difficulties of this age of transition and move forward into the next stage of its evolution, and human beings have the right to hear it. Those who accept it incur the duty of passing it on to their fellow men. The slowness of the response of the world has caused and is causing great suffering; hence the historical pressure upon Baha'is to exert every effort to teach the Faith for the sake of their fellow men. They should teach with enthusiasm, conviction, wisdom and courtesy, but without pressing their hearer, bearing in mind the words of Baha'u'llah: "Beware lest ye contend with any one, nay, strive to make him aware of the truth with kindly manner and most convincing exhortation. If your hearer respond, he will have responded to his own behoove, and if not, turn ye away from him, and set your faces towards God's sacred Court, the seat

of resplendent holiness." (Gleanings CXXVIII)
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 5, 1982, to an individual believer

THE NATURE OF TEACHING

Commandment of God

Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause. This is a theme with which whole Tablets are laden. This is the changeless commandment of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Comprehend this, O ye men of insight.
Baha'u'llah, in Tablets of Baha'u'llah, revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 196

Of all the gifts of God the greatest is the gift of Teaching. It draweth unto us the Grace of God, and is our first obligation. Of such a gift how can we deprive ourselves? Nay, our lives, our goods, our comforts, our rest, we offer them all as a sacrifice for the Abha Beauty and teach the Cause of God.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 25

He fully realizes that the demands made upon the Baha'is are great, and that they often feel inadequate, tired and perhaps frightened in the face of the tasks that confront them. This is only natural. On the other hand, they must realize that the power of God can and will assist them; and that because they are privileged to have accepted the Manifestation of God for this Day, this very act has placed upon them a great moral responsibility toward their fellow men. It is this moral responsibility to which the Guardian is constantly calling their attention....
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 37

[7.10] The phrase "advance in the process of entry by troops" accommodates the concept that current circumstances demand and existing opportunities allow for a sustained growth of the Baha'i world community on a large scale; that this upsurge is necessary in the face of world conditions; that the three constituent participants in the upbuilding of the Order of Baha'u'llah,,the individual, the institution, and the community,,can foster such growth first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it, and then by working towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and development, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Baha'i Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan,1996, to the Baha'is of the World

All these requirements must and will surely be met through reconsecrated service on the part of every conscientious member of the Community of Baha, and particularly through personal commitment to the teaching work. So fundamentally important is this work to ensuring the foundation for success in all Baha'i

undertakings and to furthering the process of entry by troops that we are moved to add a word of emphasis for your consideration. It is not enough to proclaim the Baha'i message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Baha'i membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Baha'u'llah, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant. Necessary to the progress of this life-fulfilling transformation is knowledge of the will and purpose of God through regular reading and study of the Holy Word.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1989, to the Baha'is of the World

Divine Assistance

Should any one arise for the triumph of our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him. And if his love for Me wax stronger, God will establish his ascendancy over all the powers of earth and heaven.
Baha'u'llah, in The Power of Divine Assistance, p. 9

[7.11] If one arise to promote the Word of God with a pure heart, overflowing with the love of God and severed from the world, the Lord of Hosts will assist him with such a power as will penetrate the core of existent beings.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 9

The Master assured us that when we forget ourselves, and strive with all our powers to serve and teach the Faith, we receive divine assistance. It is not we who do the work, but we are the instruments used at that time for the purpose of teaching His Cause.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 38

The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God operate through us. Stop to be conscious of your frailties, therefore; have a perfect reliance upon God; let your heart burn with the desire to serve His Mission and proclaim His call; and you will observe how eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come as a matter of course.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual an Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 21

The harder you strive to attain your goal, the greater will be the confirmations of Baha'u'llah, and the more certain you can feel to attain success. Be cheerful, therefore, and exert yourself with full faith and confidence. For Baha'u'llah has promised His Divine assistance to everyone who arises with a pure and detached heart to spread His holy Word, even though he may be bereft of every human knowledge and capacity, and notwithstanding the forces of darkness and of opposition which may be arrayed against him.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Power of Divine Assistance, p. 50

With God's help, he trusts, you will succeed. He will surely reinforce your efforts and assist you in the completion of that task that lies before you. God

will, however, assist us if we do our share and sacrifice in the path of the progress of His Faith. We have to feel the responsibility laid upon our shoulders, arise to carry it out, and then expect divine grace to be showered upon us.
From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated December 20, 1932, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Whereas plans must be carefully made, and every useful means adopted in the furtherance of this work, your Assemblies [7.12] must never let such plans eclipse the shining truth expounded in the enclosed quotations: that it is the purity of heart, detachment, uprightness, devotion and love of the teacher that attract the divine confirmations and enable him, however ignorant he be in this world's learning, to win the hearts of his fellow men to the Cause of God.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 31, 1967,
to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 124-25

THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AND TEACHING

When in session it behooveth them to converse, on behalf of the servants of God, on matters dealing with the affairs and interests of the public. For instance, teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of paramount importance, so that thereby all men may enter the pavilion of unity and all the peoples of the earth be regarded even as a single body....

Teaching the Cause must be viewed according to the conditions of the age and of the times so as to see what course is deemed proper to take. Other matters also should be dealt with in like manner. They must, however, take care that nothing doth take place contrary to the divine verses sent down in this glorious Manifestation, inasmuch as naught but that which hath been prescribed by the True One„exalted be His glory„would serve the interests of His servants.
Baha'u'llah, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, pp. 11-12

Simultaneous with the acceleration in the process of individual conversion, the equally pressing need of safeguarding local spiritual assemblies from dissolution and of increasing rapidly their number, must continually be borne in mind, as the most effective means for the strengthening of the structural basis of the Administrative Order of the Faith. Complementing this laudable task, strenuous efforts must be exerted for the purpose of multiplying the existing groups and isolated centers in all the continents of the globe.
Shoghi Effendi, in Messages to the Baha'i World, p. 118

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Why Individuals Do Not Teach„What the Assembly Can Do")

TEACHING AND THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

The limitations of space in this compilation, and its focus on the responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly rather than the individual believer, prohibit a detailed presentation of the many references [7.13] describing the spiritual prerequisites for teaching and the characteristics of

effective teaching. The Local Assembly can refer individuals to the following books: The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 16-43; The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call; and Effective Teaching.

The Obligation to Teach

The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause.
Baha'u'llah, in Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 314

Say: Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Baha, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds.
Baha'u'llah, in Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 278-79

To teach the Cause of God, to proclaim its truths, to defend its interests, to demonstrate, by words as well as by deeds, its indispensability, its potency, and universality, should at no time be regarded as the exclusive concern or sole privilege of Baha'i administrative institutions, be they Assemblies, or committees. All must participate, however humble their origin, however limited their experience, however restricted their means, however deficient their education, however pressing their cares and preoccupations, however unfavorable the environment in which they live.
Shoghi Effendi, in The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 45

Steps in the Process of Individual Teaching

The Baha'is must realize that the success of this work depends upon the individual. The individual must arise as never before to proclaim the Faith of Baha'u'llah. The most effective way for them to carry on their work is for the individual to make many contacts, select a few who they feel would become Baha'is, develop a close friendship with them, then complete confidence, and finally teach them the Faith, until they become strong supporters of the Cause of God.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 34

The friends should seek pure souls, gain their confidence, and then teach that person carefully until he becomes a Baha'i, and then nurture him until he becomes a firm and active supporter of the Faith.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 35

[7.14] The hope of Shoghi Effendi is not only to increase the number of the friends but also to have truer and more understanding Baha'is. The task of the teachers is to produce such efficient servants....
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening, pp. 33-34

The Role of the Individual

The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the reaching work and the development of the community depend. Baha'u'llah's

command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. It is the individual's duty to "consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempt to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

Shoghi Effendi underscored the absolute necessity of individual initiative and action.

He explained that without the support of the individual, "at once wholehearted, continuous and generous," every measure and plan of his National Spiritual Assembly is "foredoomed to failure," the purpose of the Master's Divine Plan is "impeded'; furthermore, the sustaining strength of Baha'u'llah Himself "will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part."

Hence, at the very crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative and sustained action.

Regarding the sense of inadequacy that sometimes hampers individual initiative, a letter written on his behalf conveys the Guardian's advice: "Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority which prevents them from addressing the public.

It is precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyze their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts.

Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in [7.15] his own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master....

Everyone is a potential teacher.

He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

It is, of course, the individual believer who bears primary responsibility for securing this goal ['expanding your membership']; therefore, it is primarily to the individual believer, "on whom," as the beloved Guardian averred, "in the

last resort, depends the fate of the entire community," that our concern in this instance is addressed. For it is the individual who possesses the will to act as a teacher or not. No Spiritual Assembly, no teaching committee, no group of well-intentioned Baha'is, however much it exerts itself, may usurp the position occupied by the individual in this fundamental activity.

...Let the individual Baha'i renew his resolve to "arise and respond to the call of teaching." Let him, acting on Shoghi Effendi's advice, "survey the possibilities which the particular circumstances in which he lives offer him, evaluate their advantages, and proceed intelligently and systematically to utilize them for the achievement of the object he has in mind." Let him also strive to obtain adequate knowledge of the teachings and reflect the virtues of that knowledge in his daily life. Finally, let him waste no time, forfeit no further opportunity.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is now imperative for every Baha'i to set for himself individual teaching goals. The admonition of 'Abdu'l-Baha to lead at least one new soul to the Faith each year and the exhortation of Shoghi Effendi to hold a Baha'i fireside in one's home every Baha'i month are examples of individual goals. Many have capacities to do even more, but this alone will assure final and complete victory for the Plan.
The Universal House of Justice, in Messages from The Universal House of Justice, p. 35

Counteracting Frustration of Slow Progress
In sum, the friends have seldom been more visibly active, but growth is slow; you feel the community has for some time been on the threshold of a breakthrough which remains elusive. The degeneration of society, as manifested by the breakdown of moral standards and the alarming increase of violence, you feel is exerting [7.16] a debilitating effect on the individual believer. You yearn for a way to free the teaching potential which to a large extent is locked up in the individual in the face of these dreadful circumstances.

We feel that an over-anxiousness on your part about a breakthrough and an undue worry over the state of society can be counterproductive. While there are opportunities for greater growth than is occurring, neither your Assembly nor the friends must burden themselves with feelings of failure at every disappointment, for such feelings are self-fulfilling and can easily cause stagnation in the expansion of the Cause. The tendency toward frustration, sometimes induced by a desire for instant gratification, must be resisted by an effort to gain deeper appreciation of the divine process. In exhorting the individual concerning the spiritual obligation resting upon him "to make of the mandate of teaching, so vitally binding upon all, the all-pervading concern of his life," Shoghi Effendi said that "every bearer of the Message of Baha'u'llah should consider it not only an obligation but a privilege to scatter far and wide the seeds of His Faith, and to rest content in the abiding knowledge that whatever be the immediate response to that Message, and however inadequate the

vehicle that conveyed it, the power of its Author will, as He sees fit, enable those seeds to germinate, and in circumstances which no one can foresee enrich the harvest which the labor of His followers will gather." You may rest assured that your particularly blessed community will not be denied a triumphant expansion if its members remain constant and confident in their teaching activities.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Why Individuals Do Not Teach„What the Assembly Can Do
The cornerstone of the foundation of all Baha'i activity is teaching the Cause. As 'Abdu'l-Baha has categorically proclaimed in His Will and Testament, "the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world is the most important of all things," and "Of all the gifts of God the greatest is the gift of Teaching."

The friends likewise are in varying degrees aware of the repeated exhortations found in the writings of our Faith that divine confirmations are dependent upon the active pursuit of the teaching work. In the words of the beloved Master, "the unseen divine assistance encompasseth those who deliver the Message." He further states, "...if the work of delivering the Message be neglected, the assistance shall be entirely cut off, for it is impossible [7.17] that the friends of God could receive assistance unless they be engaged in delivering the Message."

While the friends are generally conscious of the vital importance of teaching, yet, because of their frailties, many for the most part lack confidence, and feel they do not know what course of action to follow, or how to bring their efforts to a conclusion. Since guidance on such fundamental issues comes from the writings of the Faith, we asked the Research Department to prepare a compilation of texts on the subject....

A study of the compilation will provide the friends with stimulating information on general guidelines to be followed by them when engaged in the teaching work.

While many will be inspired, after reading the compilation, to cast aside their fears and misgivings and their sense of inadequacy, and will arise to speak forth announcing the glad-tidings of the Kingdom to their fellow-men, many more will still be in need of loving education and more detailed guidance on the part of the institutions of the Faith, and patient and wise prodding before they are aroused to action.

And since the primary purpose for which Local Spiritual Assemblies are established is to promote the teaching work, it is clear that every National Spiritual Assembly must give careful consideration to ways and means to encourage each Local Assembly under its jurisdiction to fulfill its principal obligation.

For instance, Local Assemblies could be urged to organize special meetings when texts, such as those included in this compilation, would be studied.

Furthermore, it is important that Local Assemblies share with the local friends stories of successes achieved by some of them, descriptions of effective presentations found useful by them, examples of various ways that a Baha'i subject could be introduced to inquirers, or illustrations of methods which would enable the believer to relate the needs of society to our teachings.

Such information and suggestions could be offered to the friends at Nineteen Day Feasts, through a local newsletter, or by any other means open to each Local Assembly.

In all these contacts with the believers, each Local Spiritual Assembly should impress upon the friends the unique and irreplaceable role the individual plays in the prosecution of any Baha'i undertaking.

Quotations from the writings on this point, such as the following passage from one of the letters of Shoghi Effendi, should be repeatedly presented and explained to the friends: "He (the individual believer) it is who constitutes the warp and woof on whichthe quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend.

He it is who [7.18] acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe.

He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and insure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world.

Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure.

The World Center of the Faith itself is paralyzed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it.

The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking.

The sustaining strength of Baha'u'llah Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part."

When the friends realize that the hosts of the Kingdom are waiting to rush forth and assist them, that others from their own ranks have arisen and have been successful, that everyone can find some effective method of teaching according to his own particular capacities and talents, they will then no doubt arise with greater confidence to take the first step, and this, we know, will be aided and guided from on high, for the very act of striving to respond to God's call will bring in its wake countless divine blessings.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 3, 1977,
portions of which can be found in the preface to
The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, pp. vii-viii

TEACHING AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual member and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements„adults, youth and children„in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual election. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the [7.19]friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Baha'i centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

But it is in the local Baha'i communities that the most wide-spread presentation of the Faith can take place.... It is here that the power of Baha'u'llah to organize human affairs on a basis of spiritual unity can be most apparent. Every Local Spiritual Assembly which unitedly strives to grow in maturity and efficiency and encourages its community to fulfill its destiny as a foundation stone of Baha'u'llah's World Order can add to a growing groundswell of interest in and eventual recognition of the Cause of God as the sole hope for mankind.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1985, to the Baha'is of the World

All the Baha'is, new and old alike, should devote themselves as much as possible to teaching the Faith; they should also realize that the atmosphere of true love and unity which they manifest within the Baha'i Community will directly affect the public, and be the greatest magnet for attracting people to the Faith and confirming them.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 27

Unless and until the believers really come to realize they are one spiritual family, knit together by a bond more lasting than mere physical ties can ever be, they will not be able to create that warm community atmosphere which alone can attract the hearts of humanity, frozen for lack of real love and feeling.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, pp. 25-26

(See also Chapter 8, Section entitled "Characteristics of a Baha'i Society")

The Family and Teaching

If the believer is the only one of his family who has embraced the Faith, it is his duty to endeavor to lead as many other family members as possible to the

light of divine guidance. As soon as a Baha'i family unit emerges, the members should feel responsible for making the collective life of the family a spiritual reality, animated by divine love and inspired by the ennobling principles of the Faith. To achieve this purpose, the reading of the Sacred Writings [7.20] and prayers should ideally become a daily family activity. As far as the teaching work is concerned, just as individuals are called upon to adopt teaching goals, the family itself could adopt its own goals. In this way the friends could make of their families strong healthy units, bright candles for the diffusion of the light of the Kingdom, and powerful centers to attract the heavenly confirmations.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 17, 1981, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a center for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Marriage and Family Life, pp. 67-68

Youth and Teaching
This generation of Baha'i youth enjoys a unique distinction. You will live your lives in a period when the forces of history are moving to a climax, when mankind will see the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and during which the Cause of God will play an increasingly prominent role in the reconstruction of human society. It is you who will be called upon in the years to come to stand at the helm of the Cause in the face of conditions and developments which can, as yet, scarcely be imagined....

Now is an opportunity to awaken the interest, set afire the hearts and enlist the active support of young people of every nation, class and creed in that continent. The key to success in this endeavor is, firstly, to deepen your understanding of the Teachings of the Cause so that you will be able to apply them to the problems of individuals and society, and explain them to your peers in ways that they will understand and welcome; secondly, to strive to model your behavior in every way after the high standards of honesty, trustworthiness, courage, loyalty, forbearance, purity and spirituality set forth in the Teachings; and, above all, to live in continual awareness of the presence and all-conquering power of Baha'u'llah, which will enable you to overcome every temptation and surmount every obstacle.
The Universal House of Justice, in Unrestrained as the Wind: A Life Dedicated to Baha'u'llah, p. 85

[7.21] Consistent with these observations were the outstanding contributions of the youth to expansion and consolidation. Their activities took on added dimensions during the three-year period. Actuated by youth conferences and other gatherings attentive to their interests, youth throughout the world

invested immense amounts of time, energy and zeal in the teaching work as traveling teachers within and outside their countries and as teams in collective teaching projects and, in so doing, they stimulated hundreds of new enrollments and the formation of many Local Spiritual Assemblies; involvement of youth in music and the arts as a means of proclaiming and teaching the Cause distinguished their exertions in many places; the spread of dance and drama workshops was particularly effective; participation of youth in external affairs opened new possibilities for the Faith in this field; commitment to a year of service was more widely demonstrated; at the same time there was a notable increase in the number of youth acquiring formal training and achieving academic, professional and vocational excellence„an indication that the youth are doing more in direct service to the Faith while at the same time contributing to the general development of society.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

Baha'i Youth Service Corps
Further to these aspirations is the need for a mighty mobilization of teaching activities reflecting regularity in the patterns of service rendered by young Baha'is. The native urge of youth to move from place to place, combined with their abounding zeal, indicates that you can become more deliberately and numerously involved in these activities as traveling teachers. One pattern of this mobilization could be short-term projects, carried out at home or in other lands, dedicated to both teaching the Faith and improving the living conditions of people. Another could be that, while still young and unburdened by family responsibilities, you give attention to the idea of volunteering a set period, say, one or two years, to some Baha'i service, on the home front or abroad, in the teaching or development field. It would accrue to the strength and stability of the community if such patterns could be followed by succeeding generations of youth. Regardless of the modes of service, however, youth must be understood to be fully engaged, at all times, in all climes and under all conditions. In your varied pursuits you may rest assured of the loving support and guidance of the Baha'i institutions operating at every level.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 3, 1984,
to the Baha'i Youth of the World, in Lights of Guidance, par. 2149

[7.22] Baha'i youth should be encouraged to think of their studies and of their training for a trade or profession as part of their service to the Cause of God and in the context of a lifetime that will be devoted to advancing the interests of the Faith. At the same time, during their years of study, youth are often able to offer specific periods of weeks or months, or even of a year or more, during which they can devote themselves to travel teaching or to serving the Baha'i community in other ways, such as conducting children's classes in remote villages. They should be encouraged to offer such service, which will in itself be admirable experience for the future....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to all
National Spiritual Assemblies, in Lights of Guidance, 1994 ed., par. 2137

Creating a Teaching Plan

The adoption of a local plan by the Local Assembly can exert a far-reaching influence on its work and on the life of the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 24, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The periodic re-evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching work is an essential factor in promoting the growth of every community. Through this process a community would reassess its teaching program with a view to introducing improvements where necessary.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 30, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

We long to see every Local Spiritual Assembly either spontaneously adopt its own goals or warmly welcome those it has been or will be given by its National Spiritual Assembly, swell the number of adherents who compose its local community and, guided by the general policy outlined by its National Spiritual Assembly, proclaim the Faith more effectively, energetically pursue its extension teaching and consolidation goals, arrange the observances of the Holy Days, regularly hold its Nineteen Day Feasts and its sessions for deepening, initiate and maintain community projects, and encourage the participation of every member of its community in giving to the Fund and undertaking teaching activities and administrative services, so as to make each locality a stronghold of the Faith and a torch-bearer of the Covenant....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 25, 1975, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

[7.23] Suggested Goals for Local Spiritual Assemblies

In a letter addressed to a National Spiritual Assembly, the Universal House of Justice gives examples of local goals that Local Spiritual Assemblies may wish to consider:

Any plan must have a term and specific goals, expressed preferably and if possible in numbers. For a Local Spiritual Assembly it would be better, at least in the early stages of its development, to have a term of nine months to a year. Of course it is also quite possible to have a series of plans of very short terms of say two to three months each, throughout the year.

The examples of local goals listed below are in the form of questions which each Assembly could put to itself, or may be directed to it by the National Spiritual Assembly. The questions are meant to lead to the adoption of a specific goal. An explanatory note follows items which may need clarification or comment.

A. Teaching

1. How many new believers? (The Plan calls for a "great increase in the number of believers" and confirming individuals "from every stratum of society." The ideal is for each local community to double itself every year, since every believer should, in accordance with the wish of the Master, guide one soul to the Cause of God every year. In some areas this may be an ambitious project at

the beginning, and at the outset a more modest goal could be adopted.)

2. How many firesides? (Shoghi Effendi urged the friends to hold one fireside every nineteen days in their homes. The friends willing to respond to this wish, could give their names to the Local Assembly.)

3. Can a pledge be made to have extension teaching activities outside the local area of jurisdiction? (Obviously only strong Local Assemblies can sustain such a goal.)

B. Proclamation

4. Are mass media facilities such as radio, television, and the press available to the Local Assembly? Can a goal be adopted for such activities?

5. Can public meetings be anticipated? If so, how many

6. What methods can be adopted for the dissemination of [7.24] Baha'i literature, such as distribution of books to local libraries, etc.? Can this goal be expressed in a challenging form?

7. Can the local community participate in the social and humanitarian activities of the society of which it forms a part? Could a modest step be taken along this line?

C. Consolidation

8. Can the attendance of the friends at Nineteen Day Feasts be improved upon? What about the Anniversaries? Can the increase in attendance be expressed numerically, such as in terms of the percentage of those attending?

9. Can regular meetings for the benefit of the local friends be held? If so, how often and when?...'Abdu'l-Baha exhorts the friends to hold such meetings as a "constant" activity, and praises weekly meetings. He repeatedly counsels the believers to read and recite the Holy Word in such meetings and deliver speeches on the teachings, the proofs and the history of the Faith.

10. Can daily early morning prayer sessions be held? If so, where and when? (If this is not feasible every day, an effort could be made to hold such sessions less frequently. At such devotional meetings not only prayers, but suitable selections from the Sacred Writings could be read. Baha'u'llah has pointed out that upon the Word of God "must depend the gathering together and spiritual resurrection of all men," that "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame," and that were man to "taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments." It is because of such considerations that the Five Year Plan calls for the friends to memorize selections from the Writings. If a believer finds it difficult to memorize, he may be encouraged to make for his own use a selection of extracts, however brief, which he could reread and enjoy at his own leisure, to satisfy his inner

soul.)

11. [7.25] Can youth activities be encouraged? If so, in what way?

12. Can activities and classes for children be established? If so, could a specific goal be adopted?

13. Can youth activities be maintained? Could this be expressed in the form of a goal?

14. Is the community strong enough to establish a local Haziratu'l-Quds?

15. Can a local endowment be acquired and maintained, and possibly used as an investment for the community?

16. How can local contributions to the local Fund be encouraged? Can a target be adopted?

17. Can the local community serve as host to a district conference of neighboring communities and localities?

18. Can the Local Assembly issue a regular Newsletter?

When the goals are finally decided upon, it is important that they should be announced to the friends. It should be borne in mind that Shoghi Effendi longed to see every believer involved in Baha'i service, so that universal participation may be achieved. It would be most effective if the Local Assembly, prior to such an announcement, would appoint local committees, to each of which a branch of activity or one or more of the local goals could be assigned. Such committees need not consist of many members. When the committee appointments are made, the Local Assembly will be fully prepared to announce its goals and its committee appointments to the community at a Nineteen Day Feast or a specially called meeting of the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 24, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Numerical Enrollment Goals
The House of Justice, as you know, does not consider it wise for the Baha'i institutions to set numerical goals with regard to new believers, because significant factors, such as the receptivity of individuals and the prevailing conditions in society, which influence enrollments are beyond the control of the Baha'i community. However, the aim of every Baha'i community should be a large increase in the number of adherents to the Cause. It is for this reason that the teaching work is a major concern of every Spiritual Assembly. The believers are, of course, free to adopt individual [7.26] numerical goals and endeavor to fulfill the tasks they have assigned to themselves.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 30, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Extension Teaching
The time has come, we believe, when increasing numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies should assume responsibility for helping the teaching work of

groups, isolated believers, and other Spiritual Assemblies in their neighborhood. Such extension teaching goals should be assigned by the National Spiritual Assembly or one of its teaching committees, or can be spontaneously adopted by Local Spiritual Assemblies, and should be carried out within the framework of the overall teaching plans of the country. It should also be made clear that by being given such goals a Spiritual Assembly is not being given any jurisdiction over believers outside its area, still less over other Local Spiritual Assemblies, but is being called upon to collaborate with them in their work.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Need for Systematic Efforts
Armed with the strength of action and the cooperation of the individual believers composing it, the community as a whole should endeavor to establish greater stability in the patterns of its development, locally and nationally, through sound, systematic planning and execution of its work,„and this in striking contrast to the short-lived enthusiasms and frenetic superficialities so characteristic of present-day American life. A Baha'i community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Baha'i institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism. May you with renewed determination and a rededication to spiritual values, seize your chance, while there is yet time, to convey the Message of Baha'u'llah thoughtfully, patiently and attractively to your fellow-citizens, whether they be dwellers in the cities or rural areas, whether they be high or low, lettered or unlettered, rich or poor.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

TEACHING THE MASSES/LARGE SCALE GROWTH

[7.27] When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins. Witness the emergence of Christianity and of Islam. These masses are the rank and file, steeped in traditions of their own, but receptive to the new Word of God, by which, when they truly respond to it, they become so influenced as to transform those who come in contact with them.

The Process of Teaching the Masses
God's standards are different from those of men. According to men's standards, the acceptance of any cause by people of distinction, of recognized fame and status, determines the value and greatness of that cause. But, in the words of Baha'u'llah: "The summons and Message which We gave were never intended to

reach or to benefit one land or one people only. Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever has been revealed and vouchsafed unto it." Or again, "He has endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. How could He, otherwise, have fulfilled His testimony unto men, if ye be of them that ponder His Cause in their hearts." In countries where teaching the masses has succeeded, the Baha'is have poured out their time and effort in village areas to the same extent as they had formerly done in cities and towns. The results indicate how unwise it is to solely concentrate on one section of the population. Each national assembly therefore should so balance its resources and harmonize its efforts that the Faith of God is taught not only to those who are readily accessible but to all sections of society, however remote they may be.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 31

It has been due to the splendid victories in large-scale conversion that the Faith of Baha'u'llah has entered a new phase in its development and establishment throughout the world. It is imperative, therefore, that the process of teaching the masses be not only maintained but accelerated.
The Universal House of Justice, in A Special Measure of Love, pp. 29-30

Entry by Troops
The Entry of Large Numbers
A massive expansion of the Baha'i community must be achieved far beyond all past records. The task of spreading the Message to the generality of mankind in villages, towns and cities must be rapidly extended. The need for this is critical, for without it the laboriously erected agencies of the Administrative Order will not be provided the scope to be able to develop and adequately demonstrate their inherent capacity to minister to the crying needs of [7.28] humanity in its hour of deepening despair. In this regard the mutuality of teaching and administration must be fully understood and widely emphasized, for each reinforces the other. The problems of society which affect our community and those problems which naturally arise from within the community itself, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative, will be solved as our numbers and resources multiply, and as at all levels of the community the friends develop the ability, willingness, courage and determination to obey the laws, apply the principles and administer the affairs of the Faith in accordance with divine precepts.
From the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1993, to the Baha'is of the World

Entry by troops is not merely a stage of the progress of the Cause destined to occur in its own good time, dependent on the receptivity of the population as a whole,,it is a phenomenon which the Baha'i communities, by their own activities, can prepare for and help to bring about. It is also a process which, once started, can be sustained. By a wise allocation of resources and the energetic pursuit of simultaneous plans of expansion, deepening and consolidation, the process of entry by troops should bring about a rapidly increasing supply of active believers, soundly based local communities, and

steadily evolving local and national Baha'i institutions.
From the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 9, 1993, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Baha'i Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Baha'i community is engaged in an immense historical processs that is entering a critical stage. Baha'u'llah has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Baha'i community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is a matter of immediate importance to Baha'u'llah's avowed supporters in all lands.
Message from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

The Faith advances, not at a uniform rate of growth, but in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crises and victory. In a passage written on 18 July 1953, in the early months of the Ten [7.29] Year Crusade [1953-1963], Shoghi Effendi, referring to the vital need to ensure through the teaching work a "steady flow" of "fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts," stated that this flow would "presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by 'Abdu'l-Baha, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Baha'i world." This day the Baha'i world has already seen in Africa, the Pacific, in Asia and in Latin America, and this process of entry by troops must, in the present plan, be augmented and spread to other countries for, as the Guardian stated in this same letter, it "will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Baha'u'llah." This is the time for which we must now prepare ourselves; this is the hour whose coming it is our task to hasten.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 31, 1987, to the Baha'is of the World

Increased Reception to Message
Paradoxical as it may seem, the prospects towards the breakthrough you anticipate in the teaching field are conspicuous in the current, distressing state of society. You must realize that the worse conditions become, the more plentiful are the opportunities to teach the Cause, the greater the degree of receptivity to the Divine Message. Baha'u'llah certainly gave ample foreknowledge about the radical, worldwide disturbance which His Revelation is creating as a part of the transition towards the unity and peace that are the

ultimate goal of His Faith. Your awareness of this inevitable transition should enable your members to detach themselves from the debilitating emotions aroused by the turmoil which characterizes this process and to equip your Assembly as the highest governing body of the Baha'i community in the United States to demonstrate to the fiends a confident outlook, which the persistence and vigor of their teaching activities will fully justify.
From the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Importance of Consolidation
There are now many areas in the world where thousands of people have accepted the Faith so quickly that it has been beyond [7.30] the capacity of the existing Baha'i communities to consolidate adequately these advances. The people of these areas must be progressively deepened in their understanding of the Faith, in accordance with well-laid plans, so that their communities may, as soon as possible, become sources of great strength to the work of the Faith and begin to manifest the pattern of Baha'i life.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 25, 1975,
to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in an unpublished compilation
prepared by the International Teaching Center

To pursue it [teaching] alone without consolidation would leave the community unprepared to receive the masses who must sooner or later respond to the life-giving message of the Cause.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 77

In such countries [where there is entry by troops] it is comparatively easy to bring large numbers of new believers into the Faith, and this is such a thrilling experience that visiting teachers often tend to prefer to do this rather than help with the consolidation work.... It should be pointed out that, especially if they [teachers] are assigned to expansion work, they must remember that consolidation is an essential and inseparable element of teaching, and if they go to a remote area and enroll believers whom no one is going to be able to visit again in the near future, they may well be doing a disservice to those people and to the Faith.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 16, 1981, to all Continental Pioneer Committees

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Proclamation")

The Importance of Indigenous Believers
Great as are the services rendered by pioneers, and unforgettable as are the deeds they accomplish, they cannot take the places of the indigenous element which must constitute the bedrock of the Community, carry on its own affairs, build its own institutions, support its own funds, publish its own literature, etc.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in A Special Measure of Love, pp. 17-18

From among the believers native to each country, competent traveling teachers must be selected and teaching projects worked out. In the words of our beloved

Guardian, commenting upon the teaching work in Latin America: "Strong and sustained support should be given to the vitally needed and meritorious activities started by the native...traveling teachers,...who, as the mighty task progresses, must increasingly bear the brunt of responsibility for the propagation of the Faith in their homelands.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 2, 1966, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

[7.31] Experiments in Teaching
At this stage in the development of the Faith there are many new experiments taking place in the teaching field and also in the work of consolidation. It is obvious that not all these experiments will meet with success. Many have great merit while others may have little or none. However, in the present period of transition and rapid growth of the Cause we must seek diligently for the merit of every method devised to teach and deepen the masses.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 22, 1973, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation prepared by the International Teaching Center

It is understandable that you feel concern about methods of teaching which apply pressure to people to declare their Faith in Baha'u'llah, or which register as believers those who apparently have no real knowledge of the Faith or its Message....

The teaching of the Cause has always called for wisdom, devotion, enthusiasm, purity of intention and eloquence of speech. Like other human beings, Baha'is tend to go to extremes, and too few people bring the proper balance to the way they act. This is particularly true in the teaching of the Faith. At one extreme are those who are so on fire with the love for the Faith and with awareness of the desperate need of the people for its healing Message, that they overstep the bounds of wisdom and discretion and stray into the area of proselytizing. At the other extreme are those who are so gentle in their approach and so concerned never to arouse an adverse reaction that they fail to convey the enormous importance of the Cause or to convince their hearers; for if the messenger is not enthusiastic, how can he convey enthusiasm to others? The first extreme leads to misrepresentation of the Teachings and causes disillusionment; the second results in the stagnation of the community and its failure to fulfill its fundamental duty of conveying this life-giving Message to the world.

In this, as in all aspects of the work of the Cause, the solution lies in the friends' being patient and forbearing towards those whose shortcomings distress them, and in endeavoring, through the Assemblies' consultation, to draw closer to a proper balance while maintaining the momentum of the work and canalizing the enthusiasm of the believers.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 30, 1993, to an individual believer

Your concern about consolidation and "mass teaching" is noted. The concept of

mass teaching may be better understood if put in the context of "teaching the masses." This implies reaching every [7.32] level of society in every continent and island in the world. In developing countries large segments of the population have become Baha'is, usually among the less educated. More recently, particularly in Asia, we see that the youth in high schools and colleges have been attracted to the Faith in large numbers. This does not mean, however, that there is any particular system of teaching which individual Baha'is should pursue. Different cultures and types of people require different methods of approach. While taking the fullest advantage of a workable method in one area, the friends should be open to other methods and not blindly insist upon doing the same thing everywhere. If such flexibility is understood, the...community will surely grow in numbers and strength.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 11, 1988, to an individual believer

Different Methods of Approach
We note that the new teaching methods you have developed, in reaching the waiting masses, have substantially influenced the winning of your goals, and we urge the American Baha'is, one and all, newly enrolled and believers of long standing, to arise, put their reliance in Baha'u'llah and armed with that supreme power, continue unabated their efforts to reach the waiting souls, while simultaneously consolidating the hard-won victories. New methods inevitably bring with them criticism and challenges no matter how successful they may ultimately prove to be. The influx of so many new believers is, in itself, a call to the veteran believers to join the ranks of those in this field of service and to give wholeheartedly of their knowledge and experience. Far from standing aloof, the American believers are called upon now, as never before, to grasp this golden opportunity which has been presented to them, to consult together prayerfully and widen the scope of their endeavors.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Messages From the Universal House of Justice, pp. 85-86

Balance Between Local and National Projects
We...ask you to encourage the Counselors to try to strike a balance between locally-sponsored teaching activities and nationally-directed projects which should be carried out by the National Spiritual Assembly and its committees within the limits of the manpower and the financial resources at their disposal and at a speed which would enable the consolidation to be effective.... The concentration of all teaching efforts in Local Spiritual Assemblies...is neither practical nor wise.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 13, 1975,
to the International Teaching Center, in an unpublished compilation

[7.33] Individual believers are called upon to deliver the Message and engage in individual teaching activity. However, teaching activities organized by the National Spiritual Assembly are entirely within their direction and will be conducted at their own discretion as circumstances indicate.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 13, 1971, to an

individual believer, in an unpublished compilation prepared by the International Teaching Center

It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that the excellent plans adopted will be implemented, however difficult and challenging the tasks may be. These nationally directed projects, however, should be supported by locally sponsored teaching activities carried out by Local Spiritual Assemblies. By combining the two levels of Baha'i activity, and by seeking the collaboration of the Counselors in providing the guidance and stimulation of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants at the local level, excellent results will be obtained and your high aspirations in the expansion and consolidation work will be fully realized.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 7, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation prepared by the International Teaching Center

Guarding Against Extremes
The National Spiritual Assembly or the Teaching Committees responsible for the selection of these teachers should bear in mind that their choice must depend, not only on the knowledge or grasp of the teachings on the part of the teachers, but primarily upon their pure spirit and their true love for the Cause, and their capacity to convey that spirit and love to others.

...What wonderful results will soon be witnessed in the areas under your jurisdiction if you devise ways and means to ensure, as far as circumstances permit, that the traveling teachers you are encouraging to circulate among the friends will all be...pure and sanctified souls, with nothing but true devotion and self-sacrifice motivating them in their services to God's Holy Cause.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 26, 1967, to National Spiritual Assemblies Engaged in Mass Teaching

The National Spiritual Assembly, while having the responsibility for encouraging all the believers in their services, cannot require all the friends to adopt the same methods. It must, however, guard against the extremes which some may go to in their enthusiasm and which could, in the long run, damage the Cause.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 5, 1980, to an individual believer

[7.34] In the course of carrying out such a tremendous spiritual campaign among the masses, disappointments may well be encountered. We tabulate a few instances that have been brought to our notice:

a) Visiting pioneers or teachers may find, in some places, newly enrolled believers not so enthusiastic about their religion as expected, or not adjusting to standards of Baha'i life, or they may find them thinking of material benefits they hope to derive from their new membership. We should always remember that the process of nursing the new believer into full spiritual maturity is slow, and needs loving education and patience.

b) Some teaching committees, in their eagerness to obtain results, place undue emphasis on obtaining a great number of declarations to the detriment of the quality of teaching.

c) Some traveling teachers, in their desire to show the results of the services, may not scrupulously teach their contacts, and in some rare cases, if, God forbid, they are insincere, may even give false reports.

Such irregularities have happened and can be repeated, but must not be a source of discouragement. By sending a team of teachers to an area, or by sending at intervals other teachers to those areas, and through correspondence and reports, such situations can be detected and immediately adjusted. The administration of the Faith must at all times keep in close touch with the teaching work.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 35-36

ENROLLMENT AND SYSTEMATIC FOLLOW-UP

Conditions for Enrollment
The prime motive should always be the response of man to God's Message, and the recognition of His Messenger. Those who declare themselves as Baha'is should become enchanted with the beauty of the teachings, and touched by the love of Baha'u'llah. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 32

[7.35] It is reassuring to know that the basic objective of teaching is to promote the Cause of God„not merely to increase numbers for numbers' sake. However, care should be exercised in applying this principle lest we become so rigid as to exclude from our rolls those waiting souls who have been touched by the spirit of the Faith without being very knowledgeable about all the Teachings.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 23, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 2026

As you are aware, the beloved Guardian encouraged early enrollment of new believers upon their declarations, and not the creation of obstacles to their acceptance. After declaration, follow-up with deepening is imperative, and it may be that some will fall away. However, those who remain are the true fruits of the teaching endeavor and may include persons of great merit who might have been lost to the Cause through arbitrary early judgments.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 18, 1980

Regarding the practice of urging contacts to sign enrollment cards without, as you say, giving them time to consider the step they are taking, we should bear in mind that the signature on a card, in the sense that it represents the

record of the date of the declaration of faith and data about the declarant, is to satisfy administrative requirements enabling the enrollment of the new believer in the community. The deeper implications of the declaration of faith are between the individual and God. The House of Justice requests us to share the following excerpts from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi which bear on this subject.

"The process of becoming a Baha'i is necessarily slow and gradual. The essential is not that the beginner should have a full and detailed knowledge of the Cause, a thing which is obviously impossible in the vast majority of cases, but that he should, by an act of his own will, be willing to uphold and follow the truth and guidance set forth in the Teachings, and thus open his heart and mind to the reality of the manifestation."

"...The friends should be very careful not to place hindrances in the way of those who wish to accept the Faith. If we make the requirements too rigorous, we will cool off the initial enthusiasm, rebuff the hearts and cease to expand rapidly. The essential thing is that the candidate for enrollment should believe in his heart in the truth of Baha'u'llah. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of [7.36] all the Teachings or not, is beside the point entirely. When the spark of faith exists the essential Message is there, and gradually everything else can be added unto it."
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 5, 1982, to an individual believer

(See also Chapter 6, Sections entitled "Declaration and Enrollment of New Believers" and "Special Enrollment Procedures")

Follow-Up with New Believers
The purpose of teaching is not complete when a person declares that he has accepted Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation of God for this age; the purpose of teaching is to attract human beings to the divine Message and so imbue them with its spirit that they will dedicate themselves to its service, and this world will become another world and its people another people. Viewed in this light a declaration of faith is merely a milestone along the way,„albeit a very important one. Teaching may also be likened to kindling a fire, the fire of faith, in the hearts of men. If a fire burns only so long as the match is held to it, it cannot be truly said to have been kindled; to be kindled it must continue to burn of its own accord. Thereafter more fuel can be added and the flame fanned, but even if left alone for a period, a truly kindled fire will not be extinguished by the first breath of wind.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 25, 1975,
to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in an unpublished compilation
prepared by the International Teaching Center

Above all, the utmost endeavor should be exerted by your Assembly to familiarize the newly enrolled believers with the fundamental and spiritual verities of the Faith, and with the origins, the aims and purposes, as well as the processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, to acquaint them

more fully with the history of the Faith, to instill in them a deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Baha'u'llah and of 'Abdu'l-Baha, to enrich their spiritual life, to rouse them to a greater effort and a closer participation in both the teaching of the Faith and the administration of its activities, and to inspire them to make the necessary sacrifices for the furtherance of its vital interests. For as the body of the avowed supporters of the Faith is enlarged, and the basis of the structure of its Administrative Order is broadened and the fame of the rising community spreads far and wide, a parallel progress must be achieved, if the fruits already garnered are to endure, in the spiritual quickening of its members and the deepening of their inner life.
Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening, pp. 26-27

[7.37] In the visits made to the villages, the visiting teacher meets with the Local Communities to give them basic Baha'i knowledge, such as living the Baha'i life, the importance of teaching, prayer, fasting, Nineteen Day Feasts, Baha'i elections, and contributions to the Fund. The question of contributions to the Fund is of utmost importance, so that the new believers may quickly feel themselves to be responsible members of the Community.
The Universal House of Justice, in A Special Measure of Love, p. 28

After declaration, the new believers must not be left to their own devices. Through correspondence and dispatch of visitors, through conferences and training courses, these friends must be patiently strengthened and lovingly helped to develop into full Baha'i maturity. The beloved Guardian, referring to the duties of Baha'i assemblies in assisting the newly declared believer, has written: "...The members of each and every assembly should endeavor, by their patience, their love, their tact and wisdom, to nurse, subsequent to his admission, the newcomer into Baha'i maturity, and win him over gradually to the unreserved acceptance of whatever has been ordained in the teachings.'
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 32-33

(See also Chapter 11, Section entitled "What to Teach„to Adults")

TEACHING METHODS

Many Different Methods

There are innumerable ways of teaching the Cause. You can choose the one that suits best your nature and capacity.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 22

There are, of course, many ways of teaching, and each believer should follow the methods to which he feels best suited. The important matter is not so much the method but the enthusiasm, effectiveness and devotion with which the teaching work is carried on.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 16, 1976, to the International Teaching Center, in an unpublished compilation prepared by the International Teaching Center

In teaching the Cause, much depends on the personality of the teacher and on the method he chooses for presenting the message. Different personalities and different classes and types of individuals need different methods of approach. And it is the sign of an able teacher to know how to best adapt his methods to various types of people whom he happens to meet. There is no one method [7.38] one can follow all through. But there should be as many ways of approach as there are types of individual seekers. Flexibility and variety of method is, therefore, an essential prerequisite for the success of every teaching activity.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, pp. 21-22

The same presentation of the teachings will not appeal to everybody; the method of expression and the approach must be varied in accordance with the outlook and interests of the hearer. An approach that is designed to appeal to everybody will usually result in attracting the middle section, leaving both extremes untouched. No effort must be spared to ensure that the healing Word of God reaches the rich and poor, the learned and the illiterate, the old and the young, the devout and the atheist, the dweller in the remote hills and islands, the inhabitant of the teeming cities, the suburban businessman, the laborer in the slums, the nomadic tribesman, the farmer, the university student; all must be brought consciously within the teaching plans of the Baha'i Community. Whereas plans must be carefully made, and every useful means adopted in the furtherance of this work, your Assemblies must never let such plans eclipse the shining truth that it is the purity of heart, detachment, uprightness, devotion and love of the teacher that attracts the divine confirmations and enables him, however ignorant he be in this world's learning, to win the hearts of his fellow men to the Cause of God.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 31, 1967

Your deep concern about the relative inactivity of a large portion of the...Baha'i community in the teaching field is shared by your National Spiritual Assembly and is expressed in its correspondence and reports to the World Center. The House of Justice points out, however, that there are many different ways of teaching the Faith, and each believer is free to adopt the method he finds most effective. The National Spiritual Assembly, while having the responsibility for encouraging all the believers in their services, cannot require all the friends to adopt the same methods.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 5, 1980, to an individual believer

Weaving Bonds of Fellowship
The friends of God should weave bonds of fellowship with others and show absolute love and affection towards them. These links have a deep influence on people and they will listen. When [7.39] the friends sense receptivity to the Word of God, they should deliver the Message with wisdom. They must first try and remove any apprehensions in the people they teach. In fact, every one of the believers should choose one person every year and try to establish ties of

friendship with him, so that all his fear would disappear. Only then, and gradually, must he teach that person. This is the best method.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 12

The Guardian feels that the most effective way for the Baha'is to teach the Faith is to make strong friends with their neighbors and associates. When the friends have confidence in the Baha'is and the Baha'is in their friends, they should give the Message and teach the Cause. Individual teaching of this type is more effective than any other type.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 33

Firesides
The principle of the fireside meeting, which was established in order to permit and encourage the individual to teach in his own home, has been proven the most effective instrument for spreading the Faith.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 33

The most effective method of teaching is the Fireside group, where new people can be shown Baha'i hospitality, and ask all questions which bother them. They can feel there the true Baha'i spirit,„and it is the spirit that quickeneth.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 37

Door-to-Door Teaching
We have considered the questions you put forward concerning door-to-door calling in connection with Baha'i activities....

The principles you should bear in mind are:

1. The dignity of the Faith. This should be carefully safeguarded in all Baha'i activities, and it is clear from the following quotation that the Guardian felt that door-to-door distribution of pamphlets was undignified: "He feels that to distribute Baha'i pamphlets from door-to-door...is undignified and might create a bad impression of the Faith. No doubt, it is the eagerness and devotion of the friends that led them to make this [7.40] proposal, but he does not think that the best interests of the Cause are served by such a method...."

2. Baha'u'llah's injunction as recorded in The Hidden Words: "The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing." It is important that no teaching activity should be an encroachment on people's privacy nor should it force the teachings upon unwilling listeners.

3. Integrity and sincerity. If people are to be asked to answer a questionnaire* it should be for the reason that it is necessary for the sponsor to know the answers. Baha'is should not use such a method as a subterfuge to press the message upon people.

*The proposed questionnaire was to ascertain the wishes of the public in a given area concerning religious education in schools.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 16, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Other Methods

One way every Baha'i can spread the Faith is by example. This moves the hearts of people far more deeply than words ever can.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 26

Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings...or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises....
Shoghi Effendi, in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 33

At this stage in the development of the Cause, it is essential that we seek diligently for the merit in every method devised to teach and deepen the masses.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 26, 1978

You state that your Local Spiritual Assembly has decided to stop the mass teaching effort for the time being, but you do not mention other types of teaching endeavors. While it is true that expansion and consolidation must go hand in hand, as you say, this does not necessarily mean that teaching activity is confined to mass teaching. You may wish to seek from your Assembly clarification of its decision and recommend that an intensive effort be made to carry out both teaching and consolidation activities. Regardless of the action which your Assembly takes, however, there is nothing [7.41] to keep you from pursuing your own teaching endeavors, both in attracting new seekers and confirming those who have already accepted Baha'u'llah, under the direction, of course, of your Local Assembly.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1982, to an individual believer

OTHER TOPICS

The Arts and Teaching

That day will the Cause spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings are presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May, 1933, in Baha'i News #73, p. 7

In all their efforts to achieve the aim of the Four Year Plan, the friends are also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for proclamation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic and performing arts and literature have played, and can play, a major role in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this possibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in

villages, towns or cities. Shoghi Effendi held high hopes for the arts as a means for attracting attention to the Teachings.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World

Make use of drama and singing in the teaching and deepening work and in Baha'i gatherings, where advisable. [Suggestion as one of a number of possible ways of achieving the objectives of the Six Year Plan (1986-1992)].
The Universal House of Justice, in The Six Year Plan, p. 10

Teaching and the Role of the Learned
Close Collaboration with the Learned
The Counselors, their Auxiliary Boards and their assistants on the one hand, and the National and the Local Spiritual Assemblies with their committees on the other, are all potent instruments for the teaching work. With full cooperation between them and in a spirit of unity in conducting their operations these institutions will be bountifully blessed and confirmed. The loving collaboration and dedication exemplified by these agencies and the spirit of unity they manifest in effectively reinforcing and directing the efforts of the friends will release abundant spiritual forces that will energize the body of the believers who are called upon to offer their highest service to the Faith which they have dedicated themselves to serve.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July, 1977,
to the Baha'is gathered at the Lagos, Nigeria Conference,
quoted in a letter sent by the International Teaching Center

[7.42] It is the responsibility of Spiritual Assemblies, assisted by their committees, to organize and direct the teaching work, and in doing so they must, naturally, also do all they can to stimulate and inspire the friends. It is, however, inevitable that the Assemblies and committees, being burdened with the administration of the teaching work as well as with all other aspects of Baha'i community life, will be unable to spend as much time as they would wish on stimulating the believers.

Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. It is the principle task of the Auxiliary Boards to assist in arousing and releasing this power....
The Universal House of Justice, in The Continental Boards of Counselors, p. 37

It should...be remembered that these self-same functions are being carried out by the Assemblies, national and local, and their committees, which have at this time the great responsibility for actually executing the teaching plans and for administering, consolidating and protecting the Baha'i communities. The Auxiliary Board members should thus watch carefully that their work reinforces and complements that of the administrative institutions.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 10, 1976

Primary Tasks of Propagation Boards
The primary tasks of the Propagation Boards...are to direct the believers'

attention to the goals of whatever plans have been placed before them, to stimulate and assist them to promote the teaching work in the fields of proclamation, expansion, consolidation and pioneering, to encourage contributions to the funds, and to act as standard-bearers of the teachings of the Faith, leading them to new achievements in the diffusion of God's Message to their fellow human beings.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 14, 1974

Subjects to be Discussed with the Community
While this vital teaching work is progressing each National Assembly must ever bear in mind that expansion and consolidation are inseparable processes that must go hand in hand.... To ensure that the spiritual life of the individual believer is continuously enriched, that local communities are becoming increasingly conscious of their collective duties, and that the institutions of an evolving administration are operating efficiently, is, therefore, as important as expanding into new fields and bringing in the multitudes under the shadow of the Cause.

[7.43] These objectives can only be attained when each National Spiritual Assembly makes proper arrangements for all the friends to be deepened in the knowledge of the Faith. The National Spiritual Assemblies in consultation with the Hands of the Cause...should avail themselves of the assistance of Auxiliary Board Members, who, together with the traveling teachers selected by the Assembly or its Teaching Committees, should be continuously encouraged to conduct deepening courses at Teaching Institutes and to make regular visits to local Spiritual Assemblies. The visitors, whether Board Members or traveling teachers should meet on such occasions not only with the local Assembly but, of course, with the local community members, collectively at general meetings and even, if necessary, individually in their homes.

The subjects to be discussed at such meetings with the local Assembly and the friends should include among others the following points:

1. the extent of the spread and stature of the Faith today;

2. the importance of the daily obligatory prayers (at least the short prayer);

3. the need to educate Baha'i children in the Teachings of the Faith and encourage them to memorize some of the prayers;

4. the stimulation of youth to participate in community life by giving talks, etc. and having their own activities, if possible;

5. the necessity to abide by the laws of marriage, namely, the need to have a Baha'i ceremony, to obtain the consent of parents, to observe monogamy; faithfulness after marriage; likewise the importance of abstinence from all intoxicating drinks and drugs;

6. the local Fund and the need for the friends to understand that the voluntary act of contributing to the Fund is both a privilege and a spiritual obligation. There should also be discussion of various methods that could be followed by

the friends to facilitate their contributions and the ways open to the local Assembly to utilize its local Fund to serve the interests of its community and the Cause;

7. the importance of the Nineteen-Day Feast and the fact that it should be a joyful occasion and rallying point of the entire community;

8. [7.44] the manner of election with as many workshops as required, including teaching of simple methods of balloting for illiterates, such as having one central home as the place for balloting and arranging for one literate person, if only a child, to be present at that home during the whole day, if necessary;

9. last but not least, the all-important teaching work, both in the locality and its neighboring centers, as well as the need to continuously deepen the friends in the essentials of the Faith. The friends should be made to realize that in teaching the Faith to others they should not only aim at assisting the seeking soul to join the Faith, but also at making him a teacher of the Faith and its active supporter.
The Universal House of Justice, in A Special Measure of Love, pp. 30-32

(See also Chapter 1, Section entitled "The Auxiliary Board Members")

Pioneering
The most meritorious service which anyone could render is to bring the light of divine guidance and the quickening power of the spirit to an entirely new area. Humanity is crying for salvation and it is only by the Baha'is going into the various areas of the world, that it can be brought to them. This is the reason the Guardian has encouraged all of the friends to disperse to new territories, for this is the hour for the quickening of the world.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 11, 1956,
to a Baha'i Community, in The Individual and Teaching, p. 35

The duties of teaching and pioneering are enjoined upon all believers.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 7, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Baha'u'llah (may my life, my soul, my spirit, be offered up as a sacrifice to His lowly servants) hath, during His last days on earth, given the most emphatic promise that, through the outpourings of the grace of God and the aid and assistance vouchsafed from His Kingdom on high, souls will arise and holy beings appear who, as stars, would adorn the firmament of divine Guidance; illumine the daysprings of loving kindness and bounty; manifest the signs of the unity of God; shine with the light of sanctity and purity; receive their full measure of divine inspiration raise high the sacred torch of faith; stand firm as the rock and immovable as the mountain; and grow to become luminaries in the heavens of His Revelation, [7.45] mighty channels of His grace, means for the bestowals of God's bountiful care, heralds calling forth the name of the one true God, and establishers of the world's supreme foundation.

These shall labor ceaselessly by day and by night, shall heed neither trial nor woe, shall suffer no respite in their efforts, shall seek no repose, shall

disregard all ease and comfort and, detached and unsullied, shall consecrate every fleeting moment of their life to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and exaltation of God's holy Word. Their face will radiate heavenly gladness, and their hearts be filled with joy. Their souls will be inspired, and their foundation stand secure. They shall scatter in the world, and travel throughout all regions. They shall raise their voice in every assembly, and adorn and revive every gathering. They shall speak in every tongue, and interpret every hidden meaning. They shall reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom, and manifest unto everyone the signs of God. They shall burn brightly even as a candle in the heart of every assembly, and beam forth as a star upon every horizon. The gentle breeze wafted from the garden of their hearts shall perfume and revive the souls of men, and the revelations of their minds, even as showers, reinvigorate the peoples and nations of the world.

I am waiting, eagerly waiting for these holy ones to appear; and yet, how long will they delay their coming?
'Abdu'l-Baha,in Baha'i World Faith, pp. 354-55

Homefront Pioneering
The movement of pioneers, whether settlers or itinerant teachers, which in fields so distant from this base, has exhibited so marvelous a vitality, must, within the limits of the homeland itself, be neither interrupted nor suffer a decline. The groups and isolated centers so painstakingly formed and established must, conjointly with this highly commendable and essential duty, be maintained, fostered and if possible multiplied.
Shoghi Effendi, in Citadel of Faith, p. 75

The gross materialism that engulfs the entire nation at the present hour; the attachment to worldly things that enshrouds the souls of men; the fears and anxieties that distract their minds; the pleasure and dissipations that fill their time, the prejudices and animosities that darken their outlook, the apathy and lethargy that paralyze their spiritual faculties,„these are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every would-be warrior in the service of Baha'u'llah, obstacles which he must battle against and surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his fellow countrymen.

[7.46] To the degree that the home front crusader is himself cleansed of these impurities, liberated from these petty preoccupations and gnawing anxieties, delivered from these prejudices and antagonisms, emptied of self, and filled by the healing and the sustaining power of God, he will be able to combat the forces arrayed against him, magnetize the souls of those whom he seeks to convert, and win their unreserved, their enthusiastic and enduring allegiance to the Faith of Baha'u'llah.

Delicate and strenuous though the task may be, however arduous and prolonged the effort required, whatsoever the nature of the perils and pitfalls that beset the path of whoever arises...the all-conquering potency of the grace of God, vouchsafed through the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, will, undoubtedly, mysteriously and surprisingly, enable whosoever arises to champion His Cause to

win complete and total victory.
Shoghi Effendi, in Citadel of Faith, p. 148

It is upon the individual believer, constituting the fundamental unit in the structure of the home front, that the revitalization, the expansion, and the enrichment of the home front must ultimately depend. The more strenuous the effort exerted, daily and methodically, by the individual laboring on the home front to rise to loftier heights of consecration, of self-abnegation, to contribute, through pioneering at home, to the multiplication of Baha'i isolated centers, groups and assemblies, and to raise, through diligent, painstaking and continual endeavor to convert receptive souls to the Faith he has espoused, the number of its active and wholehearted supporters, the sooner will the vast and multiple enterprises, launched beyond the confines of the homeland, and now so desperately calling for a greater supply of men and means, be provided with the necessary support that will ensure their uninterrupted development and hasten their ultimate fruition, and the lighter will be the burden of the impending contest that must be waged, sooner or later, within the borders of the Union itself, between the rising institutions of Baha'u'llah's embryonic divinely appointed Order, and the exponents of obsolescent doctrines and the defenders, both secular and religious, of a corrupt and fast-declining society.
Shoghi Effendi, in Citadel of Faith, p. 155

International Pioneering
They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause„these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power.... By My life! No act, however great, can compare with [7.47] it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most Mighty. Such a service is indeed the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act.
Baha'u'llah, as quoted by Shoghi Effendi, in The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 67-68

It would, no doubt, be of exceptional importance and value, particularly in these times when the various restrictions imposed in those countries make it difficult for a considerable number of Baha'i pioneers to establish their residence and earn their livelihood in those states, if certain ones among the believers, whose income, however slender, provides them with the means of an independent existence, would so arrange their affairs as to be able to reside indefinitely in those countries. The sacrifices involved, the courage, faith, and perseverance it demands, are no doubt very great. Their value, however, can never be properly assessed at the present time, and the limitless reward which they who demonstrate them will receive can never be adequately depicted.... Such a reward, it should be noted, is not to be regarded as purely an abstract blessing confined to the future life, but also as a tangible benefit which such courage, faith and perseverance can alone confer in this material world. The solid achievements, spiritual as well as administrative,...which believers from both Canada and the United States have accomplished, proclaim in terms unmistakable the nature of those prizes which, even in this world, such

sterling heroism is bound to win.
Shoghi Effendi, in The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 67-68

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Baha'i Youth Service Corps")

Deputization
Should they find it impossible to take advantage of so rare and sacred a privilege, let them, mindful of the words of Baha'u'llah, determine, each according to the means at his or her disposal, to appoint a deputy who, on that believer's behalf, will arise and carry out so noble an enterprise. "Center your energies," are Baha'u'llah's words, "in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, whose power hath caused the [7.48] foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded.'
Shoghi Effendi, in The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 55-56

Obtaining Funding Support
When a Baha'i finds it essential to seek the help of others, and after his own efforts and those of his family and close friends have proved inadequate, he may certainly turn to his Local Spiritual Assembly, which will consult on his problem, extend a helping hand to him, if conditions of the Local Fund permit, and even more importantly, will counsel and advise him on what opportunities are open to him, and what steps he might take to seek a solution to his problem. If the Local Assembly feels that the help and guidance of the National Assembly should be sought, it will no doubt refer the matter to the National Assembly.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 1, 1980, to an individual, in Giving to the Poor, a compilation

Traveling Teaching
It is also recorded in the blessed Gospel: "Travel ye throughout the world and call ye the people to the kingdom of God." Now this is the time that you may arise and perform this most great service and become the cause of the guidance of innumerable souls. Thus through this superhuman service the rays of peace and conciliation may illumine and enlighten all the regions and the world of humanity may find peace and composure.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Tablets of the Divine Plan, 1977 edition, p. 22

Visiting teachers, who are, at least in a general way, supposed to be more competent and able than the rest, are undoubtedly of great help. But these can never replace the mass of individual believers and fulfill what must be inevitably accomplished through the collective effort and wisdom of the community at large. What visiting teachers are supposed to do is to give the final touch to the work that has been done, to consolidate rather than supplement individual efforts and thereby direct them in a constructive and suitable channel. Their task is to encourage and inspire the individual believers, and to broaden and deepen their vision of the task that is to be

done. And this, not by virtue of any inherent spiritual right, but in the spirit of simple and whole-hearted cooperation.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated September 1, 1933

Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past [7.49] and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. I swear by Him Who is the Truth! Erelong will God adorn the beginning of the Book of Existence with the mention of His loved ones who have suffered tribulation in His path, and journeyed through the countries in His name and for His praise.
Shoughi Effendi, in The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 83

Mature teachers are the greatest need of the Faith everywhere, and no doubt in your area too. One wise and dedicated soul can so often give life to an inactive community, bring in new people and inspire them to greater sacrifice. He hopes that whatever else you are able to do during the coming months, you will be able to keep in circulation a few really good Baha'i teachers.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in A Special Measure of Love, p. 7

The first step in the preparation for international service is prayer and consultation with family about plans to serve internationally. Then, consult with your Assembly or one near you to apprise them of your plans and get the appropriate forms, Pioneer/Baha'i Youth Service Corps or International Traveling Teaching, for the service you wish to render. It is important to discuss all aspects of your preparation, physical, emotional and financial, so that the Assembly can help in the development of those skills which will be beneficial in the international field and provide whatever additional assistance my be needed. Be sure all forms, the individual's and those of the Assembly, are sent as soon as possible to the Office of Pioneering at the Baha'i National Center. Through consultation with the prospective pioneer(s), Baha'i Youth Service Corps volunteer(s) or traveling teacher(s), the Office of Pioneering is able to provide information, counsel, suggestions and actions which will facilitate the successful fulfillment of his/her/their desire to serve our beloved Cause.

Sensitive Countries
Many countries of the world are considered to be "sensitive" in their relation to the Faith. In some countries, Baha'i institutions are prohibited by law; in others, due to the prevailing political or religious climate, the Baha'i community must keep a low profile. Since circumstances throughout the world change rapidly, any persons planning to travel or settle abroad are asked to contact the Office of Pioneering at the Baha'i National Center for guidance.

(See also in this Chapter, Appendix D, "A List of Sensitive Countries")

[7.50] Teaching Minorities
All Minorities
Efforts to reach the minorities should be increased and broadened to include all minority groups such as the Indians, Spanish-speaking people, Japanese and Chinese. Indeed, every stratum of American society must be reached and can be

reached with the healing Message, if the believers will but arise and go forth with the spirit which is conquering the citadels of the southern states. Such a program, coupled as it must be with continuous consolidation, can be effectively carried out by universal participation on the part of every lover of Baha'u'llah.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973, pp. 85-86

Let anyone who feels the urge among the participators in this crusade, which embraces all the races, all the republics, classes and denominations of the entire Western Hemisphere, arise, and, circumstances permitting, direct in particular the attention, and win eventually the unqualified adherence, of the Negro, the Indian, the Eskimo, and Jewish races to his Faith. No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Baha'i community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races. A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Baha'i fraternity, and assimilated through the dynamic process of a divinely-appointed Administrative Order, and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Baha'i community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Baha'i heart.
Shoghi Effendi, in A Special Measure of Love, p. 1

The Americans have been a melting pot and a meeting place for the races of men, and the need is acute for the fulfillment of God's promises of the realization of the oneness of mankind. Particularly do the Master and the Guardian point to the Afro-Americans and the Amerindians, two great ethnic groups whose spiritual powers will be released through their response to the Creative Word. But our Teachings must touch all, must include all people. And, in this hour of your tireless activity what special rewards shall come to those who will arise, summoned by 'Abdu'l-Baha's words: "Now is the time to divest yourselves of the garment of attachment to this phenomenal realm, be wholly severed from the physical world, [7.51] become angels of heaven, and travel and teach through all these regions."
The Universal House of Justice,
in Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973, pp. 73-74

(See also Chapter 8, Section entitled "Celebrating Diversity")

American Indians
You must attach great importance to the Indians, the original inhabitants of America.... Should these Indians be educated and properly guided, there can be no doubt that through the Divine teachings they will become so enlightened that the whole earth will be illumined.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Tablets of the Divine Plan, pp. 31-32

He has always been very anxious to have the Indians taught and enlisted under

the banner of the Faith, in view of the Master's remarkable statements about the possibilities of their future and that they represent the aboriginal American population.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #188, October 1946, pp. 3-4

In the Divine Plan bequeathed to you by 'Abdu'l-Baha is disclosed the glorious destiny of those who are the descendants of the early inhabitants of your continent. We call upon the indigenous believers who are firmly rooted in the Baha'i Teachings to aid, through both deed and word, those who have not yet attained that level of understanding. Progress along the path to their destiny requires that they refuse to be drawn into the divisiveness and militancy around them, and that they strive to make their own distinctive contribution to the pursuit of the goals of the Four Year Plan, both beyond the confines of North America and at home. They should be ever mindful of the vital contribution they can make to the work of the Faith throughout the American continent, in the circumpolar areas and in the Asian regions of the Russian Federation.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Followers of Baha'u'llah

He was particularly happy to see that some of the Indian believers were present at the Convention. He attaches the greatest importance to teaching the original inhabitants of the Americas the Faith. 'Abdu'l-Baha Himself has stated how great are their potentialities, and it is their right, and the duty of the non-Indian Baha'is, to see that they receive the Message of God for this Day. One of the most worthy objectives of your Assembly must be the establishment [7.52] of all-Indian Spiritual Assemblies. Other minorities should likewise be especially sought out and taught. The friends should bear in mind that in our Faith, unlike every other society, the minority, to compensate for what might be treated as an inferior status, receives special attention, love and consideration.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in A Special Measure of Love, pp. 19-20

African Americans
He urges you all to devote particular attention to the contact with racial minorities. In a country which has such a large element of prejudice against its colored citizens as the United States, it is of the greatest importance that the Baha'is,„and more especially the youth,„should demonstrate actively our complete lack of prejudice and, indeed, our prejudice in favor of minorities. We cannot very well prosecute a teaching campaign successfully...if we do not in our home communities demonstrate to the fullest extent our love for the people who spring from the African population!
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Youth, p. 18

The real means of eliminating race prejudice, is to spread and establish the Faith; for in it, there is no prejudice whatsoever, as the Faith itself holds as its cardinal principle, the Oneness of Humanity. The Guardian will pray that you will be confirmed in your efforts to teach more Negroes. They have been

subject so long to the prejudices of the majority peoples, that he hopes they will find their goal in the Cause of God.... The friends should concentrate on pure hearted people, and continue association and fellowship with them, until they themselves become active workers in the Cause of God.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Power of Unity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism, pp. 105-6

The Baha'is should by all means endeavor to attract to the Faith as many members of the colored race as they possibly can, and thus demonstrate in deeds the universality of the Message of Baha'u'llah. It is only through this intermingling of races within the framework of His World Order that a lasting and just solution can be found to the perplexing racial issues confronting mankind.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Power of Unity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism, p. 107

Also...the Faith must be representative of the population. In a great many places in the South, the majority of the population [7.53] is still Negro. This should be reflected in the Baha'i Community, fearlessly. Both the white Baha'is and the colored Baha'is must steadily work to attain this objective of bringing the Faith to the colored people, and of confirming many of them in it.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in To Move the World, p. 294

We direct the attention of the believers of African descent, so beloved by the Master, to the pressing need for pioneers, who will contribute to the further development of the Cause in distant areas, including the continent of Africa for which they were assigned a special responsibility by the Guardian when the first systematic campaign was launched for its spiritual illumination. Although their contributions to all aspects of Baha'i service on the home front and elsewhere will be of great value, they can be a unique source of encouragement and inspiration to their African brothers and sisters who are now poised on the threshold of great advances for the Faith of Baha'u'llah.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Followers of Baha'u'llah

Special Circumstances Regarding Teaching Chinese
(See Appendix A)

Special Circumstances Regarding Teaching Persons from Southeast Asian Countries
(See Appendix B)

Special Circumstances Regarding Teaching Muslims
(See Appendix C)

Summer and Winter Schools
The institution of the Summer School constitutes a vital and inseparable part of any teaching campaign, and as such ought to be given the full importance it deserves in the teaching plans and activities of the believers. It should be organized in such a way as to attract the attention of the non-believers to the Cause and thus become an effective medium for teaching. Also it should afford

the believers themselves an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the Teachings, through lectures and discussions and by means of close and intense community life.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, p. 3

(See also Chapter 11, Section entitled "Baha'i Schools/Summer and Winter Schools)

[7.54] Applying the Teachings to the Needs of Society
Involvement with Society
The time has come for the Baha'i community to become more involved in the life of the society around it, without in the least supporting any of the world's moribund and divisive concepts, or slackening its direct teaching efforts, but rather, by association, exerting its influence towards unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism, and declaring its faith in the divine purpose of human existence.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1985, to the Baha'is of the World

(See also Chapter 12, Section entitled "Association with Other Organizations")

Baha'i Scholarship and Teaching
The Cause needs more Baha'i scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Baha'is are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening, p. 44

It seems what we need now is a more profound and coordinated Baha'i scholarship in order to attract such thinking men as you are contacting. The world has„at least the thinking world„caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound "new" to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to recreate society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men!
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 28

(See also Chapter 11, Section entitled "Baha'i Scholarship")

SUGGESTED READINGS

Teaching
The Power of Divine Assistance, Extracts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, Extracts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. Compiled by the Universal House of Justice

Tablets of the Divine Plan, 'Abdu'l-Baha

The Advent of Divine Justice, Shoghi Effendi

Promoting Entry by Troops, from the Universal House of Justice

A Special Measure of Love: The Importance and Nature of the Teaching Work among the Masses, Messages from Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, pub. 1974 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

Youth Can Move the World, compilation by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

A Homefront Pioneering Handbook, prepared by the National Teaching Committee

Effective Teaching Workbook, prepared by the National Teaching Committee

The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet; Our Response to Plans, by Palabra Publications

Minority Teaching
The Power of Unity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism

A Special Measure of Love: The Importance and Nature of the Teaching Work among the Masses, Messages from Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, pub. 1974 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

To Move the World, Gayle Morrison

Pioneering, International Service and Traveling Teaching
A Manual for Pioneers, Ruhiyyih Rabbani

Success in Teaching, a pamphlet, Ruhiyyih Rabbani

Quickeners of Mankind, Pioneering in a World Community, compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada

Transforming a Dream into Reality, Parts I & II, prepared by the Office of Pioneering

Traveling Teaching, prepared by the National Teaching Committee, September, 1987

APPENDIX A
SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES REGARDING TEACHING CHINESE
[7.56] Arising number of students and scholars from [China] have also traveled or resided temporarily overseas to advance their education...We should use this current opportunity to offer sincere friendship and hospitality to these Chinese visitors and to acquaint them with the progressive teachings of Baha'u'llah so as to foster in them a positive view of the Faith...However, caution and wisdom should be exercised to avoid anything which may make these

Chinese visitors uncomfortable. Attendance at Baha'i functions should be left to their discretion, and the fact that citizens of the PRC are engaged in or participating in Baha'i activities should not be publicized, even amongst Baha'is.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Individual Baha'is with academic, professional, or particular business credentials are urged to take advantage of natural situations in the course of their work to meet their peers from the People's Republic of China. They are also encouraged, whenever feasible, to offer their services in projects which may take them into the Chinese mainland. In this way they may be able to establish cordial contact with high officials as well as with individual Chinese citizens.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Efforts should also be made to increase the awareness of the Baha'i youth to the importance of meeting Chinese people at school and at work. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to take up studies in the Chinese language and culture when possible and to specialize in their respective professions on aspects related to China.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Increasing emphasis must also be placed on the teaching work among Chinese who have been long settled in your country as well as those who are students or longterm visitors from places with [7.57] large Chinese populations such as Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore, or Taiwan.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a Chinese national wishes to become a Baha'i, you should either contact your National Spiritual Assembly or refer to the "Guidelines for Baha'i Institutions on teaching and enrolling citizens of the People's Republic of China residing overseas," (published in 1989), for guidance.

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Mainland Chinese")

APPENDIX B
GUIDANCE FOR REACHING PERSONS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

[7.58] Suggested methods for reaching Southeast Asians living in the United States:

1. Visit regularly and hold Baha'i events such as unity feasts, picnics in Southeast Asian neighborhoods, and Holy Day celebrations in community centers. Invite the Southeast Asian friends to display aspects of their unique cultures including music, dance, arts and crafts, in a spirit of long fellowship and unity in diversity.

2. Adopt a Southeast Asian youth to establish bonds of friendship and trust with these youth who are not easily accepted in American society by their peers. Baha'i youth can direct Southeast Asian youth toward positive influences and away from undesirable elements.

3. Provide Southeast Asians, particularly the youth, with scholarships to attend Baha'i schools, conferences, workshops, etc. (Some Baha'i schools offer special scholarships for youth.)

4. Concentrate on empowering Southeast Asian women by establishing strong bonds of friendship and trust so that they will understand that the Baha'i community is like their family.

5. Encourage Southeast Asian children and their parents to attend Baha'i Sunday School classes held in the community.

6. Increase the effectiveness of teaching efforts by creating opportunities for Southeast Asian Baha'is to give talks, firesides, and deepenings. Provide any encouragement, coaching, or materials needed to enable them to teach. Make sure to include Southeast Asian adults, youth, and children in your plans. Get them involved. On the first contact, take a Southeast Asian friend along; after a few times, they will feel comfortable to teach on their own.

7. Enlist the assistance of Southeast Asian community leaders to invite non-Baha'i Southeast Asians to Baha'i activities. [7.59] Southeast Asians respect and honor clan leaders, so that once a clan leader approves a program the remainder of the Southeast Asian community may follow (possibly leading to entry by troops).

8. Provide practical solutions to the many problems faced by the Southeast Asians such as offering English as a Second Language (ESL) to Southeast Asian women who often lack opportunities to learn English.

9. Place ads in local Southeast Asian newspapers In Southeast Asian languages and/or spots on television and radio asking Southeast Asian Baha'is to contact their Baha'i family. Be sure to provide telephone numbers.

10. Provide academic tutoring to assist Southeast Asian youth and children with their school work and help Southeast Asian parents to understand American youth and the rights and responsibilities of parents in the American education system.

APPENDIX C
SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES REGARDING TEACHING MUSLIMS IN THE WEST

The appropriate course of action must depend critically on the wisdom and discretion of those involved. Among the factors to which due weight must be given are whether the Muslim to whom the Faith is being presented is a close relative, a long-standing personal friend, a Muslim born in the West from foreign parents, a permanent resident, a visitor or student planning to return to his home country in the near future, a prominent figure well-known in Muslim circles, or a person from a country where there is a sustained campaign of

manifest opposition to the Faith. Another factor arises if the Baha'i in contact with Muslims is one who is from a Muslim background, or has had experience living abroad in a Muslim country.

...in most circumstances, it would be wise not to seek out Muslims who have come from other countries with the aim of teaching the Faith to them. Most often, it would be best to respond to interest evinced by a Muslim seeker, allowing the relationship to [7.60] develop under the impetus of the inquirer. In some cases, it would suffice to provide literature which would serve to correct misconceptions about the Faith and its relationship to Islam, or would satisfy the curiosity of a casual inquirer.

Under all conditions, due care should be taken to avoid needlessly arousing the antagonism of Muslim opponents of the Cause in the West through provocative or rash actions, In addition, it would be counterproductive if activities which aimed to attract

Eastern and Southeastern Asia
Muslims to the Faith were to be misconstrued by the general public as being evidence that the Baha'i Faith is no more than a derivative of Islam concerned solely with winning converts from its parent religion. Muslims from the Indian subcontinent, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, and from other countries of eastern and southeastern Asia, with the exception of Malaysia, may be taught the Faith and enrolled, as other individuals in the West.

Special consideration applies to Malaysians, since teaching the Faith to Muslims in Malaysia is prohibited by law. There is no restriction on enrolling Malays who are resident permanently abroad, but the enrollment of those intending to return to their homeland should be deferred pending consultation with the Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia. There is no restriction on teaching non-Muslim Malaysians.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 20, 1994, to several National Spiritual Assemblies

Iranian Muslims
Caution vis-a-vis Iranian Muslims continues to be necessary. They should not be sought out by the Baha'is in order to teach them the Faith and application for enrollment in the Baha'i community should generally be discouraged.

However, it has been observed that Iranian Muslims are becoming increasingly interested in receiving accurate information about the Faith which, in their homeland, has always been maligned and misrepresented by its enemies. It can only be to the advantage of the Faith if Iranian Muslims residing outside Iran are acquainted with the history and tenets of the Faith. Care must be taken, however, that in doing so, Baha'is do not become enmeshed in the affairs of the Iranian Muslims, nor should they spend much time participating in their social life. It is preferable that such persons be referred to appropriate literature in Persian which can be obtained from various National Spiritual Assemblies and made [7.61] available to them through public libraries and universities, by mail or personal conveyance.

Furthermore, some Baha'is have relatives and close friends who are Iranian Muslims and who happen to reside in the West, and the Baha'is are not expected to relinquish these friendships nor should they cut themselves off from their Muslim relatives, as this would be contrary to the spirit of our Faith. They should, however, use wisdom and moderation in their contacts with such persons, avoid to the extent possible giving information about the activities of Baha'is in Iran, and take care not to become embroiled in any political activities. They should not try to teach the Faith to such people.

If a person of Iranian Muslim background is spontaneously attracted to the Faith through his contact with the Baha'is, there would be no objection if a suitable Baha'i friend were to assist him or her to understand the Cause. Whether or not such a person, upon claiming to accept Baha'u'llah and His teachings, is enrolled in the Baha'i community is a different issue which has to be considered separately in each case.
Guidelines of the Universal House of Justice on teaching Iranian Muslims, included in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 20, 1989

Black Muslims
Black Muslims (Nation of Islam), while they may be influenced by traditional Muslim views of the Baha'i Faith, are nonetheless Americans and may be taught the Faith without restrictions. The friends are simply urged to use wisdom in their teaching activities.

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Special Enrollment Procedures„Iranians (Persians) and Other Muslims from the Middle East")

APPENDIX D
A LIST OF SENSITIVE COUNTRIES

[7.62] Afghanistan
Algeria
Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia)
Bahrain
Bhutan
Brunei
Burundi
Cambodia
China, People's Republic of
Cuba
Egypt
Guinea
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Jordan
Kuwait

Lao People's Democratic Republic
Lebanon
Liberia
Libya
Mali
Mauritania
Morocco
Niger
Niue
North Korea
Oman
Qatar
Seychelles
Sudan
Syria
Tunisia
United Arab Emirates
Viet Nam
Yemen

These countries are listed at this time and are subject to possible change. Please contact the Office of Pioneering regarding information on any country to which you plan to go.

APPENDIX E
SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES CONCERNING THE TEACHING AND ENROLLMENT OF PRISONERS

[7.63] A prisoner, showing sincere faith in the Cause, may be accepted as a Baha'i on the same basis of investigating his qualifications as to belief as any other individual outside prison. Each case should be carefully considered on its own merits. Naturally, a person in confinement cannot be active in any community and administrative work. When he gets out, he becomes part of the community in which he resides. No new ruling is required in this matter. All other details in relation to prisoners can be decided by the National Spiritual Assembly concerned as they arise.
From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Unfolding Destiny, p. 352

There is no reason why a prisoner should not be accepted as a declared believer on the same basis as anybody else. They are now expiating their crime against society, and, if their hearts have changed, and they accept the Cause, there is no reason why they should be excluded from membership.
From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated April 23, 1955, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

You are free to accept declarations of faith from inmates of a prison, but their participation as voting believers can take place only after they have been discharged from prison. The fact of having been in prison does not deprive a Baha'i from exercising his voting rights when he is released and there is no need for a probationary period. However, if there is some other factor which

would indicate to the National Assembly that in a particular case the voting rights should be suspended, the National Assembly may then exercise its discretion.
From a letter of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The National Spiritual Assembly feels that it is in the best interest of the Faith in the United States at this time to discourage Spiritual Assemblies, committees and individual believers from initiating teaching projects in prisons. It sometimes happens, however, that a believer's professional or volunteer work will bring them in contact [7.64] with prisoners who may inquire about the Baha'i Faith. While individuals are not prohibited from teaching prisoners, they should regard this activity as a personal project in much the same way as teaching the Faith at a fireside in one's home. Baha'is in prison are, of course, free to teach their religion to fellow prisoners.

Prisoners who wish to be enrolled as Baha'is should be encouraged, but not required as such, to submit in writing their declaration of faith. Since Baha'i Declaration cards are not readily available in prisons and Assemblies are not always accessible to prisoners, expressing their acceptance of Baha'u'llah in writing is a direct way for prisoners to make their intentions known and enables the institutions to sense the person's understanding of the Faith. Nonetheless, wherever possible, Spiritual Assemblies should arrange to have their representatives interview the new declarants in prison in order to make certain that they are acquainted with basic information about the Faith.

Baha'is who are prisoners may participate in Baha'i activities permitted by law and their circumstances. The National Spiritual Assembly has adopted the policies, however, that Local Spiritual Assemblies will not be formed in prisons, prisoners may not vote for or serve on Assemblies, and copies of The American Baha'i will not be sent to prisoners. Whatever the degree of the prisoner's freedom to participate in Baha'i community life, this vital point, as stated by the Universal House of Justice, should be borne in mind: "A prisoner may never have the opportunity to attend a Baha'i function yet he may achieve to its fullest his relationship and obedience to the Will of God and His Manifestations.'

The following suggestions are offered as an assistance to those who may find themselves in the position of working with or teaching prisoners:

1. It is often more effective to work with prisoners of one's own gender, particularly in a one-on-one setting. Since prisoners are segregated by gender, they may be more easily distracted by someone of the opposite gender than they would be outside of prison.

2. Care should be taken to dress appropriately. In a setting where all prisoners wear a uniform color of coveralls, they may find a business suit intimidating or overly casual clothing to be distracting.

3. Respect the privacy of the prisoner by not asking what he did to be

incarcerated, though it is entirely possible that the prisoner will share this information on his own.

4. [7.65] Since prisoners are exposed to many negative attitudes and behaviors, it is important to maintain a positive attitude when conversing with them. It is especially important not to give the appearance of criticizing other religious or ethnic groups or the prison administration.

5. Prisoners should clearly understand that becoming a Baha'i is an expression of religious belief and that they should not expect that the Baha'i community will provide them with either career education or a job when they are released from prison.

6. It is helpful to know what resources are available to prisoners in the prison itself. For example, many prisoners have a history of substance abuse, and most prisons and jails have treatment programs. In addition, many prisons offer education programs to assist prisoners in getting high school and college degrees as well as professional training.

7. Check with the prison administration in advance before bringing any refreshments or publications into the prison.

8. Use discretion in giving out any telephone numbers and addresses to prisoners, keeping in mind that this information may fall into the hands of other prisoners who may abuse it. Under no circumstances should a prisoner, whether enrolled as a Baha'i or not, be provided with a community membership list, nor should community newsletters be sent to prisoners.

9. Be careful not to make promises to prisoners that cannot be fulfilled. This will only disappoint them and cause disillusionment. Some prisoners may ask for help in contacting friends and family who are not accepting their collect calls or answering their letters. Again, discretion should be exercised in the handling of such requests as the parties may have good reasons for not responding to the prisoner.

10. If a prisoner who is a Baha'i is scheduled to be released from prison soon, consult with the prison administration and social service agencies in the area about what services, such as shelter, healthcare and employment, might be available to him upon his release.

11. Treat prisoners with respect and dignity. Ask about their interests, values and enjoyable activities. If a prisoner feels that someone is genuinely interested in his well-being, he may [7.66] have more credibility in your confidence in him that he can reform his life through the teachings of Baha'u'llah.

8„THE DISTINCTIVE BAHA'I COMMUNITY

DEVELOPING A DISTINCTIVE BAHA'I COMMUNITY

Characteristics of Distinction

[8.1] Wherever a Baha'i community exists, whether large or small, let it be

distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life.
The Universal House of Justice,
Messages From the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, p. 12

A Baha'i community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Baha'i institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The people of the world not only need the laws and principles of the Baha'i Faith,,they desperately need to see the love that is engendered by it in the hearts of its followers, and to partake of that atmosphere of tolerance, understanding, forbearance and active kindness which should be the hallmark of a Baha'i Community.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 5, 1942,
to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1345

[8.2] Purpose for a Distinctive Baha'i Community
Bedrock of Baha'i National Growth and Development
The Guardian fully agrees with your idea that the permanent welfare of the Faith demands the steady development of local Baha'i community life. This is the bedrock of Baha'i national growth and development.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated September 10, 1932, to an individual believer

Transformation of Human Life
By winning the Seven Year Plan, by consolidating our local com-munities, and above all by strengthening and deepening our understanding of the purpose of Baha'u'llah's Revelation we shall be preparing ourselves to play our part in bringing about that transformation of human life on this planet which must take place ere it becomes fit to receive the bounties and blessings of God's own Kingdom.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1985, to the Baha'is of the World

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members of and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its

activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements„adults, youth and children„in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Baha'i centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.
The Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World, in The Four Year Plan„Messages of the Universal House of Justice, p. 35, par. 3.26

The Five Year Plan [1974-1979] witnessed great progress in the spiritual development of the friends, the growing maturity and wisdom of Local and National Assemblies, and in the degree to which Baha'i communities embody the distinguishing characteristics of Baha'i life and attract, by their unity, their steadfastness, their radiance and good reputation, the interest and eventual whole-hearted support of their fellow citizens. This is the magnet which [8.3] will attract the masses to the Cause of God, and the leaven that will transform human society.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1979 to the Baha'is of the World

Attracting Others to the Faith
But it is in the local Baha'i communities that the most widespread presentation of the Faith can take place.... It is here that the power of Baha'u'llah to organize human affairs on a basis of spiritual unity can be most apparent.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1985, to the Baha'is of the World

It is this marked contrast between the vigor, unity, and discipline of the Baha'i community on the one hand, and the increasing confusion, despair, and feverish tempo of a doomed society on the other, which, during the turbulent years ahead, will draw the eyes of humanity to the sanctuary of Baha'u'llah's world-redeeming Faith.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1966, to the Baha'is of the World

All the Baha'is, new and old alike, should...realize that the atmosphere of true love and unity which they manifest within the Baha'i Community will directly affect the public, and be the greatest magnet for attracting people to the Faith and confirming them.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated April 14, 1947, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Characteristics of a Baha'i Society
Unity of Mankind
As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of

behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements„ adults, youth and children„in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Baha'i centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.
Universal House of Justice, in The Four Year Plan: Messages of the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1996, Palabra Publications edition, p. 35, par. 3.26

[8.4] This Five Year Plan [1974-1979] must witness the development in the world-wide Baha'i community of distinctive Baha'i characteristics implanted in it by Baha'u'llah Himself. Unity of mankind is the pivotal principle of His Revelation; Baha'i communities must therefore become renowned for their demonstration of this unity. In a world becoming daily more divided by factionalism and group interests, the Baha'i community must be distinguished by the concord and harmony of its relationships. The coming of age of the human race must be foreshadowed by the mature, responsible understanding of human problems and the wise administration of their affairs by these same Baha'i communities. The practice and development of such Baha'i characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Baha'is and the administrative institutions, although the greatest opportunity to foster their growth rests with the Local Spiritual Assemblies.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to the Baha'is of the World

Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Baha'u'llah. Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on the one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity....
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 41-42

References for further reading:
Perspectives on Spiritual Integration, a Compilation (Extracts form the writings and Utterances of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice), [8.5] Published by the Persian/American Affairs Office of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, dated 1993

The Baha'i Faith seeks to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the unity of all peoples. Indeed, such diversity will enrich the tapestry of human life in a peaceful world society. The House of Justice supports the view that in every country it is quite appropriate for the cultural traditions of the people to be observed within the Baha'i community as long as they are not contrary to the teachings.... At the present time, the challenge to every Baha'i community is to avoid suppression of those culturally-diverse elements which are not contrary to the teachings, while establishing and maintaining such a high degree of unity that others are attracted to the Cause of God.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 25, 1988, to an individual believer

(See also Chapter 9, Section entitled "Participation in Other Cultural/Religious Festivals")

References for further reading:
The Advent of Divine Justice, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 38, 5
Baha'u'llah and the New Era, J.E. Esslemont, p. 154
The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 51
Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 290-91

Dawn Prayers
One of the characteristics of the Baha'i society will be the gathering of the believers each day during the hours between dawn and two hours after sunrise to listen to the reading and chanting of the Holy Word. In many communities at the present time, especially in rural ones, such gatherings will fit naturally into the pattern of the friends' daily life, and where this is the case it would do much to foster the unity of the local community and deepen the friends' knowledge of the Teachings if such gatherings could be organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly on a regular basis. Attendance at these gatherings is not to be obligatory but we hope that the friends will more and more be drawn to take part in them. This is a goal which can be attained gradually.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Naw-Ruz, 1974,
to the Baha'is of the World, in Lights of Guidance, 1994 ed., par. 1560

[8.6] References for further reading:
Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, The Universal House of Justice
The Promise of World Peace, The Universal House of Justice

Devotional Meetings
It is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Baha'i centers, where available, or

elsewhere, including the homes of believers.
Message from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World,
in The Four Year Plan„Messages of the Universal House of Justice, p. 35, par. 3.26

ROLE OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Baha'i membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of the community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.
Message from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1996,
to the Baha'is of the World, in The Four Year Plan„
Messages of the Universal House of Justice, p. 34, par. 3.24

The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Baha'u'llah's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Baha'i society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Baha'u'llah's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Baha'i flock.
The Universal House of Justice, The Five Year Plan, Naw-Ruz, 1974

These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in God Passes By, p. 332

Responsibility of Individual Assembly Members
Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives [8.7] of the Baha'i community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. It must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 26

They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Administration, pp. 63-64

Unity Within the Assembly
The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the unity of God.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Administration, p. 22

(See also Chapter 1, Sections entitled "The Covenant and the Administrative Order" and "Strengthening and Development„Vital Objectives"; Chapter 4, Sections entitled "Consultation and the Divine Institutions" and "Conditions Necessary for Effective Consultation"; Article XI of the By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly)

Instruments for Establishing Unity and Harmony
The Spiritual Assemblies are collectively the most effective of all instruments for establishing unity and harmony.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 83-84

Developing the Baha'i Community
Every Local Spiritual Assembly which unitedly strives to grow in maturity and efficiency and encourages its community to fulfill its destiny as a foundation stone of Baha'u'llah's World Order can add to a growing groundswell of interest in and eventual recognition of the Cause of God as the sole hope for mankind.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1985, to the Baha'is of the World

Fostering Love and Unity
The Assembly shall therefore above all recognize its sacred duty to maintain full and complete unity throughout the Baha'i community....
Local Spiritual Assembly By-laws, Article IV

[8.8] They [Spiritual Assemblies] must endeavor to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted cooperation for the service of the Cause.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 38

The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with a firm determination to act with justice in all the cases which are submitted to them for their consideration.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 9, 1934,
to an individual believer, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 34

(See also Chapter 1, Section entitled "The Relation of the Assembly with the Baha'is")

Unity in Diversity
Integrating Persian Baha'is
The International Teaching Center has sent us a copy of your letter of 10

October, 1982, asking about language problems brought about by the influx of Iranians who do not understand English. It is important that the Iranian friends be encouraged to make the effort to learn the language used in the country and become integrated into the life and activities of the community. The Nineteen Day Feasts and other official gatherings of the friends should be conducted in whatever is the conventional local language. This does not mean, of course, that at such gatherings some of the readings could not be in the language of the immigrants, or that, if these friends so wish, some classes and conferences may not be held and conducted in their own language for their benefit. The essential thing is, as stated above, to promote the integration of the immigrants into the community and avoid feelings of estrangement or disunity on account of language.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 10, 1982, to an individual believer

Encouraging Minority Participation
In the light of this principle, and bearing in mind the extreme desirability of having the minority elements participate and share responsibility in the conduct of Baha'i activity, it should be the duty of every Baha'i community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the divers minority elements within it are [8.9] already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Baha'i representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible. The adoption of such a course, and faithful adherence to it, would not only be a source of inspiration and encouragement to those elements that are numerically small and inadequately represented, but would demonstrate to the world at large the universality and representative character of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, and the freedom of His followers from the taint of those prejudices which have already wrought such havoc in the domestic affairs, as well as the foreign relationships, of the nations.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 35-36

(See also in this Chapter, Sections entitled "Unity of Mankind" and "Freedom from Prejudice," and also Chapter 9, Section entitled "Holy Days, the Nineteen Day Feast, and Special Events")

References for further reading:
American Culture and Traditions: A Handbook for New Americans, 1989
Iranian Refugees in America: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, 1986

Integrating Southeast Asian Baha'is
The Universal House of Justice has received a report...enclosing a list of Baha'i refugees who have relocated to your country.... No doubt you will make every effort to contact these friends and to integrate them into the Baha'i community.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
February 19, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Unlike western people who tend to respond to bulletins, flyers, and meetings, most Southeast Asians prefer to receive visitors and establish bonds of friendship and trust. In general, they love to host unity Feasts or Holy Day observances in their homes.

Moreover, extend provisions for children regularly to attend Baha'i classes for their spiritual training. Give consistent attention to involving the youth in the expansion and consolidation work and to opening channels of activity suited to their talents and necessary for their development into mature Baha'is. Increase the number and effectiveness of observances of Nineteen Day Feasts.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1996, to the followers of Baha'u'llah

[8.10] Supporting Youth Participation
Give great attention and support to youth participation in community life and to their teaching the Cause to their own generation in high schools, colleges and elsewhere; encourage and offer guidance to Baha'i youth to plan their lives to be of greatest service to the Faith, and provide the means whereby their offers of specific periods of teaching and other service beyond normal teaching activities can be organized and used to the best advantage.
The Universal House of Justice, in Challenge: Messages to Baha'i Youth, p. 11

References for further reading:
Baha'i Youth, pp. 20-21
Challenge: Messages to Baha'i Youth
The Universal House of Justice, Message to the Baha'i Youth of the World, January 3, 1984
The Universal House of Justice, Message to the Baha'i Youth of the World, May 8, 1985
Unrestrained As the Wind: A Life Dedicated to Baha'u'llah

Equality of Women and Men
The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practicing this Baha'i principle. Baha'i women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1984, to the Baha'is of the World

HOW TO DEVELOP A DISTINCTIVE COMMUNITY LIFE

Firmness in the Covenant
The first condition [to attain the supreme station destined for the friends by Baha'u'llah] is firmness in the Covenant.... It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Baha'i world save the Covenant of God.... It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 49

References for further reading:
The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 321
Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 203, 246, 292

[8.11] Spiritual Development
At present we must complete the objectives of the Seven Year Plan [1979-1986], paying great attention to those inner spiritual developments which will be manifested in greater unity among the friends....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1983, to the Baha'is of the World

Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Baha'i institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1966, to the Baha'is of the World

Consolidation Activities
Consolidation activities promote the individual spiritual development of the friends, help to unite and strengthen Baha'i community life, establish new social patterns for the friends, and stimulate the teaching work.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 17, 1981, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Signs of the consolidation of the community were also discernible in the greater involvement of the friends in social and economic development, particularly in the field of education.
Message from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1996, to the Baha'is of the World, in The Four Year Plan„Messages of the Universal House of Justice, p. 27, par. 3.9

(See also Chapter 7, Sections entitled "Consolidation" and "Teaching and the Local Community")

Nineteen Day Feasts
In brief, this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends, that it may bring believers into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this center to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord's supper. It attracts confirmations of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 21

References for further reading:
Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, pp. 3-13

Service to Humanity
O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate [8.12] the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior.

Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 93-94

With the utmost friendliness and in a spirit of perfect fellowship take ye counsel together, and dedicate the precious days of your lives to the betterment of the world and the promotion of the Cause of Him Who is the Ancient and Sovereign Lord of all.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 184

There is nothing that brings success in the Faith like service. Service is the magnet which draws the divine confirmations. Thus, when a person is active, they are blessed by the Holy Spirit. When they are inactive, the Holy Spirit cannot find a repository in their being, and thus they are deprived of its healing and quickening rays.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, July 12, 1952, in Living the Life, p. 18

The Baha'i world community will expand its endeavors in both social and economic development and external affairs, and thus continue to collaborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world. By improving its coordinating capacity, the Office of Social and Economic Development will assist in building, as resources and opportunity permit, on the progress already made with hundreds of development projects around the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts will be aimed at influencing the process towards world peace, particularly through the community's involvement in the promotion of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development.
Message from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1996,
to the Baha'is of the World, in The Four Year Plan,,
Messages of the Universal House of Justice, p. 38, par. 3.33

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

Relationship Among the Baha'is
Unity Among the Believers
It behoveth all the beloved of God to become as one, to gather together under the protection of a single flag, to stand for a uniform body of opinion, to follow one and the same pathway, to hold fast to a single resolve. Let them forget their divergent theories and put aside their conflicting views since, God be praised, our purpose is one, our goal is one. We are the servants of one Threshold, we all draw our nourishment from the same one Source, we all are [8.13] gathered in the shade of the same high Tabernacle, we all are sheltered under the one celestial Tree.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 230

Praise be to God, the hearts of the friends are united and linked together, whether they be from the east or the west, from north or from south, whether they be German, French, Japanese, American and whether they pertain to the white, the black, the red, the yellow or the brown race. Variations of color, of land and of race are of no importance in the Baha'i Faith; on the contrary, Baha'i unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 113

In their relations amongst themselves as fellow-believers, let them not be content with the mere exchange of cold and empty formalities often connected with the organizing of banquets, receptions, consultative assemblies, and lecture-halls. Let them rather, as equal co-sharers in the spiritual benefits conferred upon them by Baha'u'llah, arise and, with the aid and counsel of their local and national representatives, supplement these official functions with those opportunities which only a close and intimate social intercourse can adequately provide. In their homes, in their hours of relaxation and leisure, in the daily contact of business transactions, in the association of their children, whether in their study-classes, their playgrounds, and club-rooms, in short under all possible circumstances, however insignificant they appear, the community of the followers of Baha'u'llah should satisfy themselves that in the eyes of the world at large and in the sight of their vigilant Master they are the living witnesses of those truths which He fondly cherished and tirelessly championed to the very end of His days....
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 130

References for further reading:
Baha'i Administration, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 35, 67
Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 217-218
The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 156, 192
Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 191
Tablets of the Divine Plan, 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 50

[8.14] Freedom from Prejudice
Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes and habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Baha'i community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized groups, committees and Assemblies. It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Baha'i meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p.30

Promote Harmony
When criticism and harsh words arise within a Baha'i community, there is no remedy except to put the past behind one, and persuade all concerned to turn over a new leaf, and for the sake of God and His Faith refrain from mentioning the subjects which have led to misunderstanding and inharmony. The more the friends argue back and forth and maintain, each side, that their point of view is the right one, the worse the whole situation becomes. When we see the

condition the world is in today, we must surely forget these utterly insignificant internal disturbances, and rush, unitedly, to the rescue of humanity. You should urge your fellow-Baha'is to take this point of view, and to support you in a strong effort to suppress every critical thought and every harsh word, in order to let the spirit of Baha'u'llah flow into the entire community, and unite it in His love and His service.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 16, 1951

Role of Individuals
The believers [must] increasingly stand out as assured, orientated, and fundamentally happy beings, conforming to a standard which, in direct contrast to the ignoble and amoral attitudes of modern society, is the source of their honor, strength, and maturity.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1966, to the Baha'is of the World

For the Baha'i Faith is above all a way of life. It is not a mere philosophical or social doctrine. It is a closely-knit and harmoniously [8.15] functioning community, a world-wide spiritual fraternity which seeks to reform the world first and foremost by bringing about a deep inner spiritual change in the heart of individuals. To live the Teachings of the Cause should be the paramount concern of every true believer, and the only way to do so is to commune both in spirit and through actual concrete means with the entire community of the faithful. The Baha'i Cause encourages community life and makes it a duty for every one of its followers to become a living, a fully active and responsible member of the world-wide Baha'i fellowship.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated August 13, 1936,
to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1570

High Moral Character
As to a chaste and holy life it should be regarded as no less essential a factor that must contribute its proper share to the strengthening and vitalization of the Baha'i community, upon which must in turn depend the success of any Baha'i plan or enterprise.... All of them, be they men or women, must, at this threatening hour when the lights of religion are fading out, and its restraints are one by one being abolished, pause to examine themselves, scrutinize their conduct, and with characteristic resolution arise to purge the life of their community of every trace of moral laxity that might stain the name, or impair the integrity, of so holy and precious a Faith.

A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Baha'is, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. It must adorn and reinforce the ceaseless labors and meritorious exertions of those whose enviable position is to propagate the Message, and to administer the affairs, of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. It must

be accorded special consideration in the conduct of the social activities of every Baha'i summer school and any other occasions on which Baha'i community life is organized and fostered. It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Baha'i youth, both as an element in the life of the Baha'i community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 29-30

[8.16] Demonstrate Belief in Peace
These, indeed, are the days when heroism is needed on the part of the believers. Self-sacrifice, courage, indomitable hope and confidence are the characteristics they should show forth, because these very attributes cannot but fix the attention of the public and lead them to enquire what, in a world so hopelessly chaotic and bewildered, leads these people to be so assured, so confident, so full of devotion? Increasingly, as time goes by, the characteristics of the Baha'is will be that which captures the attention of their fellow-citizens. They must show their aloofness from the hatreds and recriminations which are tearing at the heart of humanity, and demonstrate by deed and word their profound belief in the future peaceful unification of the entire human race.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 26, 1941,
to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1348

(See also Chapter 12, Section entitled "Association with Other Organizations")

Unity in Family Life The Family as a Microcosm of Society
Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members...? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.
'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 157

References for further reading:
Paris Talks, 'Abdu'l-Baha
The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 157, 168
Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 117-122
Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986

SUGGESTED READINGS

The Divine Art of Living: Selections from the Baha'i Writings, compiled by Mabel Hyde Paine

[8.17] The Power of Divine Assistance, Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of

Justice, 1981

The Promise of World Peace, The Universal House of Justice, 1985

Issues Concerning Community Functioning (a Memorandum Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice)

Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude, compiled by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice

Trustworthiness, compilation of Writings from Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Universal House of Justice, compiled by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice

The Word of God, prepared by the National Teaching Committee

Unrestrained As the Wind: A Life Dedicated to Baha'u'llah, "The Distinctive Baha'i Life," pp. 21-27, a joint project of the Baha'i National Youth Committee and the Baha'i Publishing Trust

Race Unity
The Power of Unity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism, selections from the Writing of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, compiled by Bonnie Taylor of the National Race Unity Committee

The Advent of Divine Justice, Shoghi Effendi

Eliminating Racial Prejudice: the Baha'i Perspective (a Study Guide in Persian), Published by the Persian/American Affairs Office of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, dated 1995

Race Unity: A Baha'i Perspective„video cassette

Women
Women: A Compilation, excerpts from Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1986

[8.18] Greatness Which Might Be Theirs, a collection of essays present to attendees of the United Nations conference in Beijing, China, prepared by the Baha'i International Community

The Individual
The Pattern of Baha'i Life, a compilation of extracts from the Baha'i Writings on living a Baha'i life, published by the Publishing Trust of the United Kingdom

Living the Life, a compilation of guidance from letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

9„HOLY DAYS, THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST, AND SPECIAL EVENTS

[9.1] BAHA'I HOLY DAYS, FESTIVALS AND THE FAST
Dates

* Naw-Ruz March 21
Ridvan Festival April 21-May 2
* The first day April 21
* The ninth day April 29
* The twelfth day May 2
* Declaration of the Bab May 23
* Ascension of Baha'u'llah May 29
* Martyrdom of the Bab July 9
* Birth of the Bab October 20
* Birth of Baha'u'llah November 12
Day of the Covenant November 26
Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha November 28
Ayyam-i-Ha (Intercalary Days) February 25-March 1
Period of fasting March 2-March 20

* Days on which work and school should be suspended

Note: The dates above refer to the Baha'i day, which begins at sunset on the preceding day and ends at sunset on the date listed.

Descriptions
Naw-Ruz„March 21

References for further reading:
Prayers and Meditations, Baha'u'llah, pp. 67-69

Separate Celebrations for Naw-Ruz Feast and Nineteen Day Feast
The Naw-Ruz Feast should be held on March 21 before sunset and has nothing to do with the 19-day Feast. The 19-day Feast is administrative in function whereas the Naw-Ruz is our New Year, a Feast of hospitality and rejoicing.
Shoghi Effendi, in Directives from the Guardian, p. 46

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Events Commemorated on Their Gregorian Anniversaries")

[9.2] Ridvan Festival„April 21-May 2
Rejoice with exceeding gladness, O people of Baha, as ye call to remembrance the Day of supreme felicity, the Day whereon the Tongue of the Ancient of Days hath spoken....
Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 35

The word Ridvan means Paradise. For twelve days, April 21 through May 2, Baha'is celebrate the period in 1863 when Baha'u'llah resided in a garden in Baghdad, which was later called the "Garden of Ridvan." During this period Baha'u'llah proclaimed His Mission as God's Messenger for this age.

References for further reading:
Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 27-35; pp. 319-22
Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 111-12
God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 148-59

Celebration of First, Ninth, and Twelfth Days of Ridvan

As regards various matters you raised in your letters, the reason we commemorate the 1st, 9th and 12th days of Ridvan as Holidays (Holy Days) is because one is the first day, one is the last day, and the third one is the ninth day, which of course is associated with the number 9. All 12 days could not be holidays, therefore these three were chosen.
Letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated June 8, 1952,
to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, p. 230

The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should commemorate...the first day of Ridvan, at about 3:00 p.m. on 21 April.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 56

Declaration of the Bab„May 23
Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad declared Himself to be the Bab, or "Gate of God," to Mulla Husayn-i-Bushru'i on May 23, 1844. This date marks the beginning of the Baha'i Faith, the Baha'i Era (B.E.) and the Baha'i calendar.

The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should commemorate...the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab on May 22, at about two hours after sunset.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 56

[9.3] References for further reading:
Baha'u'llah, The King of Glory, H.M. Balyuzi, pp. 26-31
God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 3-12
Nabil's Narrative, Abridged, pp. 47-96
The World Order of Baha'u'llah, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 123-28

Ascension of Baha'u'llah„May 29
Baha'u'llah ascended to the Abha Kingdom on May 29, 1892, at the Mansion of Bahji near "Akka, Israel. He was seventy-four.

The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should commemorate...the anniversary of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah on 29 May at 3:00 a.m.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 56

References for further reading:
Baha'u'llah, The King of Glory, H.M. Balyuzi, pp. 420-29
God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 221-33

Martyrdom of the Bab„July 9
In 1850, Mirza Taqi Khan, Grand Vizier of the new Shah, Nasiri'd-Din, ordered the Bab executed. On July 9, the Bab was brought before a firing squad in the barracks square of Tabriz, along with a young follower. When the smoke cleared, the Bab was nowhere to be seen. He was later located in the room He had occupied, finishing a conversation with His amanuensis. The commander of the Armenian regiment, Sam Khan, refused to fire a second time and another regiment had to be found. This time their bullets killed the Bab. His remains were hidden by the Babis and in 1899 transferred to Palestine. In 1909 'Abdu'l-Baha Himself interred the Bab's remains in the sepulcher on Mount Carmel known as

the Shrine of the Bab.

The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should commemorate...the anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Bab on 9 July, at about noon.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 56

References for further reading:
God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 49-60
Nabil's Narrative, Abridged, pp. 500-26

[9.4] Birth of the Bab„October 20
The Bab was born Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad on October 20, 1819, in Shiraz, Iran.

References for further reading:
Nabil's Narrative, Abridged, pp. 72-76

Birth of Baha'u'llah„November 12
Baha'u'llah was born Mirza Husayn-'Ali on November 12, 1817, in Tihran, Iran. His mother was Khadijih Khanum and his father Mirza Buzurg-i-Vazir.

References for further reading:
Baha'u'llah, The King of Glory, H.M. Balyuzi, pp. 9-25
Nabil's Narrative, Abridged, pp. 12-13

Day of the Covenant„November 26
November 26th is dedicated to 'Abdu'l-Baha as the Center of the Covenant. 'Abdu'l-Baha asked the friends not to observe His birthday, May 23, as "this blessed Day must become known as the Day of the Declaration of His Highness the Supreme [the Bab]." The friends then asked 'Abdu'l-Baha if they could have a day to celebrate which would be exclusively associated with Him. After many supplications to Him, 'Abdu'l-Baha gave them November 26. It was referred to as the Fete Day of 'Abdu'l-Baha, or as "The Feast of the Appointment of the Center of the Covenant."

Many years later, in enumerating the Baha'i Feast Days and Holy Days, Shoghi Effendi instructed that November 26 should be observed as the Day of the Covenant by the believers throughout the world, and should be referred to by that name.

References for further reading:
'Abdu'l-Baha: The Centre of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, H. M. Balyuzi, pp. 9, 523

Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha„November 28
'Abdu'l-Baha ascended to the Abha Kingdom in Haifa, Israel, November 28, 1921.

The anniversaries of the birth and ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha are not to be regarded as days on which work is prohibited. The celebration of these two days is however obligatory.
Shoghi Effendi, in The Baha'i World, vol. 9, p. 346

[9.5] The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the friends should

commemorate...the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha on 28 November, at 1:00 a.m.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 56

References for further reading:
The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Lady Blomfield and Shoghi Effendi

Ayyam-i-Ha February 26-March 1
In the West, the Intercalary Days (Ayyam-i-Ha) are the four days of the year (five days in leap year) which fall between the eighteenth and nineteenth month of the Baha'i Calendar (Mulk and "Ala"), February 26 to March 1. These days are set aside for hospitality, gift-giving, special acts of charity, and preparing for the Fast. In Nabil's Narrative, the purpose of these days is explained:

Baha'u'llah designated [the] days as the "Ayyam-i-Ha" [Intercalary Days] and ordained that they should immediately precede the month of "Ala', which is the month of fasting. He enjoined upon His followers to devote these days to feasting, rejoicing, and charity. Immediately upon the termination of these intercalary days, Baha'u'llah ordained the month of fasting to begin.
Nabil's Narrative, Abridged

References for further reading:
Baha'i Prayers, pp. 236-237
For children: The Ayyam-i-Ha Camel, Cher Holt-Fortin

The Fast„March 2-March 20
Baha'is fast for 19 days from sunrise to sunset. In the West, the fast period begins at sunrise March 2 and extends until sunset March 20.

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Fasting")

Preparing for the Holy Days
By observing the Holy Days, the believers can show honor and reverence for Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha. The Local Spiritual Assemblies sponsor the commemorations and ensure that the programs are befitting to the occasions.

Some Holy Days„the Martyrdom of the Bab, the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha„should be observed in a solemn and reverent manner.

[9.6] Other Holy Days„Naw-Ruz, Ridvan, the anniversaries of the Birth of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, and the Declaration of the Bab„are festive. The general character of the festive Holy Days is described by 'Abdu'l-Baha in a talk about the Feast of Naw-Ruz:

All should rejoice together, hold general meetings, become as one assembly, so that the national oneness, unity and harmony may be demonstrated in the eyes of all.

As it is a blessed day it should not be neglected, nor deprived of results by making it a day devoted to the pursuit of mere pleasure.

During such days institutions should be founded that may be of permanent benefit and value to the people....

Preparations for a Holy Day might include a review of the history of the day and study of the lives of the Central Figures. Before the event itself, the Assembly may want to help the community prepare for a Holy Day by:

´ Holding a special class on the history of the Holy Day
´ Reviewing the events being commemorated
´ Holding a special meeting for the children so that they can anticipate the day and learn about its significance
´ Discussing plans at preceding Feasts for commemorating the day

When to Observe Definition of the Baha'i Day
With reference to your question in connection with the observance of Baha'i Holy Days; the Baha'i day begins and ends at sunset. The night preceding a Holy day is therefore included in the day, and consequently work during that period is forbidden.
Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 68

Daylight Saving Time
Regarding your question of the proper time to celebrate or hold our meetings of commemoration: the time should be fixed by counting after sunset; the Master passed away one hour after midnight, which falls a certain number of hours after sunset; so His passing should be commemorated according to the sun and regardless of daylight saving time. The same applies to the Ascension of Baha'u'llah who passed away about eight hours after sunset.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, pp. 56,„57

[9.7] As the Guardian indicated, the commemoration of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah should be held, if feasible, at 3 a.m. on 29 May, and that of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha at 1 a.m. on 28 November. These times should be measured according to standard time in each area. If daylight saving time is being used in the country, the commemorations should continue to be observed according to standard time.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 15, 1992, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Events Commemorated on Their Gregorian Anniversaries
Until the Universal House of Justice decides upon the spot on which the calculations for establishing the date of Naw-Ruz each year are to be based it is not possible to state exactly the correspondence between Baha'i dates and Gregorian dates for any year. Therefore for the present the believers in the West commemorate Baha'i events on their traditional Gregorian anniversaries. Once the necessary legislation to determine Naw-Ruz has been made, the correspondence between Baha'i and Gregorian dates will vary from year to year depending upon whether the Spring Equinox falls on the 20th, 21st, or 22nd March. In fact in Persia the friends have been, over the years, following the Spring Equinox as observed in Tihran, to determine Naw-Ruz, and the National Spiritual Assembly has to issue every year a Baha'i calendar for the guidance of the friends. The Universal House of Justice feels that this is not a matter of urgency and, in the meantime, is having research conducted into such

questions.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 30, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Observing the Holy Days
From time to time questions have arisen about the application of the law of the Kitab-i-Aqdas on the observance of Baha'i holy days. As you know, the recognition of Baha'i holy days in at least ninety-five countries of the world is an important and highly significant objective of the Nine Year Plan [1964-1973], and is directly linked with the recognition of the Faith of Baha'u'llah by the civil authorities as an independent religion enjoying its own rights and privileges.

The attainment of this objective will be facilitated and enhanced if the friends, motivated by their own realization of the importance of the laws of Baha'u'llah, are obedient to them.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 7, 1947, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[9.8] Briefly, every nation has a day known as a holiday which they celebrate with joy.

In the sacred laws of God, in every cycle and dispensation, there are blessed feasts, holidays and workless days.

On such days all kinds of occupations, commerce, industry, agriculture etc., are not allowed.

Every work is unlawful.

All must enjoy a good time, gather together, hold general meetings, become as one assembly, so that the national oneness, unity and harmony may become personified in all eyes.

As it is a blessed day it should not be neglected or without results by making it a day limited to the fruits of mere pleasure.

During such blessed days institutions should be founded that may be of permanent benefit and value to the people so that in current conversation and in history it may become widely known that such a good work was inaugurated on such a feast day.

Therefore, the intelligent must search and investigate reality to find out what important affair, what philanthropic institutions are most needed and what foundations should be laid for the community on that particular day, so that they may be established.

For example, if they find that the community needs morality, then they may lay down the foundation of good morals on that day.

If the community be in need of spreading sciences and widening the circle of knowledge, on that day they should proceed in that direction, that is to say, direct the thoughts of all the people to that philanthropic cause.

If, however, the community is in need of widening the circle of commerce or industry or agriculture they should start the means so that the desired aim may be attained.

If the community needs protection, proper support and care of orphans, they should act upon the welfare of the orphans, etc.

Such undertakings that are beneficial to the poor, the weak and the helpless should be pursued in order that, on that day, through the unity of all and through great meetings, results may be obtained, the glory and blessings of that day may be declared and manifest.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Star of the West, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 8-9

Reciting the Tablets of Visitation
In answer to an earlier letter on this subject, the House of Justice stated that nothing has been found in the Writings requiring the believers to stand and face the Qiblih every time the Tablets of Visitation are recited. The House of Justice feels that it is very important that no issue be made about such minor details. When, however, one is actually in, or within the precincts of one of the Holy

[9.9] Shrines, it is an act of simple reverence to stand and face the Shrine when the Tablet of Visitation is recited.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 21, 1994, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

Your e-mail message of 18 July 1995 to...at the Baha'i World Center, asking whether it is mandatory for the Tablets of Visitation to be read on the occasion of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah or the Martyrdom of the Bab, was referred to our Department for reply. In a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, it is stated, while it is only natural for the friends to recite these Tablets on the anniversaries associated with the Central Figures of our Faith, no texts have been located by the Research Department of the House of Justice which make the use of these Tablets obligatory.
Electronic message dated 31 August, 1995,
written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

Suspension of Work and School
Nine Days Relating to the Bab and Baha'u'llah
The days pertaining to the Abha Beauty (Baha'u'llah) and the Primal Point (the Bab), that is to say these nine days, are the only ones on which work connected with trade, commerce, industry and agriculture is not allowed. In like manner, work connected with any form of employment, whether governmental or otherwise, should be suspended.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in The Baha'i World, vol. 7, p. 537

Being Excused from Work
He wishes also to stress the fact that, according to our Baha'i laws, work is forbidden on our Nine Holy Days. Believers who have independent businesses or

shops should refrain from working on these days. Those who are in government employ should, on religious grounds, make an effort to be excused from work; all believers, whoever their employers, should do likewise. If the government, or other employers, refuse to grant them these days off, they are not required to forfeit their employment, but they should make every effort to have the independent status of their Faith recognized and their right to hold their own religious Holy Days acknowledged.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 55

Baha'i Institutions
This distinction between institutions that are under full or partial Baha'i control is of fundamental importance. Institutions that are entirely managed by Baha'is are, for reasons that are only too obvious, under the obligation of enforcing all the laws and [9.10] ordinances of the Faith, especially those whose observance constitutes a matter of conscience. There is no reason, no justification whatever, that they should act otherwise.... The point which should be always remembered is that the issue in question is essentially a matter of conscience, and as such is of a binding effect upon all believers.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated October 2, 1935, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The basic principle that institutions that are entirely managed by Baha'is are under the obligation of obeying the Baha'i laws regarding the observance of Holy Days is clear. A problem, however, arises in relation to service institutions and work of a service nature that cannot be postponed.

There are, of course, many Baha'i activities that are carried on on the Holy Days in addition to the celebration of the Holy Days themselves, such as the election of Local Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day of Ridvan, the holding of the National Convention, which may well coincide with one or more Holy Days, and other praiseworthy activities. It is not this kind of "work" that is prohibited. Thus, there would be no objection to the holding of sessions of a Summer School or Weekend School on a Holy Day,„although they might well be modified in form in recognition of the particular day, and would give time for the actual commemoration.

In light of these considerations, and others drawn from the Sacred Texts, the House of Justice advises that, in the case of the Landegg Conference Center, the work performed during a Baha'i Holy Day by the household staff, whether Baha'i or non-Baha'i, should be reduced to the minimum necessary to provide the normal essential services, including, of course, the work needed in connection with the celebration of the Holy Day itself. When the Manager is scheduling the booking of the premises to non-Baha'i groups he should either try to arrange that the period of letting does not include a Baha'i Holy Day or, if it does, he should explain to the group at the time of booking that there will be limited service rendered by the staff on the Holy Day. Of course, if no events are scheduled at the Center on a Baha'i Holy Day, it would be possible to close the Center on that day.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,

dated December 3, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[9.11] Baha'i-Owned Businesses
As you are well aware, not only should Baha'is refrain from work on the nine Holy Days, but the shops and establishments owned by Baha'is should also be closed on these Days. If government regulations do not require the station to be on the air on a mandatory daily basis, Radio Baha'i should not engage in regular broadcasts on the nine Holy Days. However, to aid the Baha'i Community in its observance of any one of these Days, the station may offer at a particular time a special program suited to such observance. Those wishing to be involved in the production and airing of the program would be rendering a special service.

You have no doubt noted that since the Baha'i day begins at sunset and ends at the following sunset, no Gregorian day would be fully taken up by the observance of any one of the nine Baha'i Holy Days; thus there is time to broadcast regular programs every day of the Gregorian year. The station naturally will inform its listeners of the meaning of each Holy Day well in advance so that they can appreciate the reason for the station's silence on such a Day.

The House of Justice feels that this confirmation of the religious character of the station would be a means of teaching, a source of encouragement to the believers and a model for their emulation.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 6, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 17 November 1975 and in reply to your specific question, "May our Baha'i-owned retail mattress store remain open in the care of our non-Baha'i employees on the Holy Days when we refrain from working?', has instructed us to say that in shops or stores owned by Baha'is, the fact that they may have non-Baha'is in employment does not exempt the Baha'i owners from closing their businesses on Baha'i Holy Days.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 30, 1975, to an individual believer

Suspension of Baha'i Administrative Activities
Concerning the suspension of Baha'i administrative activities on Baha'i Holy Days, we have found the texts of the Guardian's instructions in which he says that the work of Local Assemblies, committees and other institutions of the Faith preferably should be suspended, but that the final decision rests with the Universal House of Justice.

We feel that the time is not yet ripe to add anything further, [9.12] and therefore we leave the application of the above instructions of the Guardian to your National Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 3, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Children„Being Excused from School

Steps should be taken to have Baha'i children excused, on religious grounds, from attending school on Baha'i Holy Days wherever possible. The Guardian has said:

Regarding children: at fifteen a Baha'i is of age as far as keeping the laws of the Aqdas is concerned,„prayer, fasting, etc. But children under fifteen should certainly observe the Baha'i holy days, and not go to school, if this can be arranged on these nine days.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 25, 1947, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Whenever possible, steps should be taken to have Baha'i children excused on religious grounds from attending school on the (nine) Baha'i holy days. It is the responsibility of the Local Spiritual Assembly and Baha'i parents to ensure that children observe Baha'i holy days in ways that are meaningful to them educationally and spiritually.

Generally, it is only necessary to write a letter to the Board of Education or similar authority asking for recognition. The Holy Days, and a brief explanation of each, should be listed. The letter should point out that these dates are the same each year; hence, they would not always fall on regularly scheduled school days.

The parents are usually requested to send a note in advance of each Holy Day to the teacher or principal, and the children are expected to make up any lost work.

Along with the letter, it is sometimes helpful to include a pamphlet or two and to mention that many school districts throughout the United States have granted permission for Baha'i children to be excused from attending classes on Baha'i Holy Days.

(See also a sample letter for this purpose in Appendix A)

THE NINETEEN DAY FEASTS

[9.13] Baha'i Months and Dates of Nineteen Day Feasts

Month	Arabic Name	Translation	First Day
1st	Baha	Splendor	March 2
2nd	Jalal	Glory	April 9
3rd	Jamal	Beauty	April 28
4th	"Azamat	Grandeur	May 17
5th	Nur	Light	June 5
6th	Rahmat	Mercy	June 24
7th	Kalimat	Words	July 13
8th	Kamal	Perfection	August 1
9th	Asma'	Names	August 20
10th	"Izzat	Might	September 8
11th	Mashiyyat	Will	September 27
12th	"Ilm	Knowledge	October 16

13th Qudrat Power November 4
14th Qawl Speech November 23
15th Masa'il Questions December 12
16th Sharaf Honor December 31
17th Sultan Sovereignty January 19
18th Mulk Dominion February 7
19th "Ala' Loftiness March 2

Note: The dates above refer to the Baha'i day, which begins at sunset on the preceding day and ends at sunset on the date listed.

The Baha'i day starts and ends at sunset, and consequently the date of the celebration of Baha'i feasts should be adjusted to conform to the Baha'i calendar time.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 56

Purpose and Significance

The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends. It occupied much of the consultation at the Sixth International Baha'i Convention last year, and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.

The World Order of Baha'u'llah encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes human expression in its varied forms [9.14] towards the construction of a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an institution of which all the people of Baha are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.

Three Distinct Parts

"If this feast be held in the proper fashion," 'Abdu'l-Baha states, "the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world." To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends. The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Center and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

Room for Variety

Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is

much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; 'Abdu'l-Baha recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the consultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a salutary diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various societies in which it is held, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.

Historical Evolution

It is notable that the concept of the Feast evolved in stages in relation to the development of the Faith. At its earliest stage in Iran, the individual friends, in response to Baha'u'llah's injunctions, hosted gatherings in their homes to show hospitality once every nineteen days and derived inspiration from the reading and discussion of the Teachings. As the community grew, 'Abdu'l-Baha delineated and emphasized the devotional and social character of the event. After the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi [9.15] introduced the administrative portion and acquainted the community with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

Expression of Community Life

But it is not only in the sense of its gradual unfoldment as an institution that the evolution of the Feast must be regarded; there is a broader context yet. The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes as the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of community life„acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togetherness„over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence. The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting "a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.'

Link to Entire Structure of Administrative Order

Moreover, because of the opportunity which it provides for conveying messages from the national and international levels of the administration and also for communicating the recommendations of the friends to those levels, the Feast becomes a link that connects the local community in a dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order. But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which a society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building

processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of the people combines an array of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.

Preparation

If the Feast is to be properly experienced, beyond an understanding of the concept must also be the preparation of it and the preparation for it. Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is administratively responsible for the conduct of the Feast, it often calls upon an individual or a group of individuals to make preparations„a practice which is consonant with the spirit of hospitality so vital to the occasion. Such individuals can act as hosts and are sometimes [9.16] concerned with the selection of the prayers and readings for the devotional portion; they may also attend to the social portion. In small communities the aspect of personal hospitality is easy to carry out, but in large communities the Local Spiritual Assemblies, while retaining the concept of hospitality, may find it necessary to devise other measures.

Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional program. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held, whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness, arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways„all play a significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved Master offers the following advice: "Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamored each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in the resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardors of the spirit."

Spirit of Hospitality

In absorbing such advice, it is illuminating indeed to view the Nineteen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in the "Kitab-i-Aqdas" in these words: "Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means." It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity and conviviality. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith labored so long and suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that the foundation is laid for the

realization of so unprecedented a reality.

That you may all attain the high mark set for the Feast as a "bringer of joy," the "groundwork of agreement and unity," the "key [9.17] to affection and fellowship," will remain an object of our ardent supplications at the Holy Threshold.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 27, 1989, to the Followers of Baha'u'llah

O ye loyal servants of the Ancient Beauty: In every cycle and Dispensation, the Feast hath been favored and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. This is especially the case today, in this Dispensation beyond compare, this most generous of ages, when it is highly acclaimed, for it is truly accounted among such gatherings as are held to worship and glorify God. Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried away from itself.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 1

That is, the friends should there dwell upon God and glorify Him, read the prayers and holy verses, and treat one another with the utmost affection and love.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 19

Purpose
Thou has written to his honor...concerning the Feast. This Feast was established by His Highness the Bab, to occur once in nineteen days. Likewise, the Blessed Perfection (Baha'u'llah) hath commanded, encouraged and reiterated it. Therefore, it hath the utmost importance. Undoubtedly you must give the greatest attention to this establishment and raise it to the highest point of importance, so that it may become continual and constant. The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles, read the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses, glorifications and praises of the Self-subsistent Lord and deliver eloquent speeches. The owner of the house must personally serve the beloved ones. He must seek after the comfort of all and with the utmost humility he must show forth kindness to every one. If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the "Lord's supper," for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, pp. 19-20

[9.18] The primary intent is to kindle these stirrings of the spirit, but at the same time it follows quite naturally that those present should partake of food, so that the world of the body may mirror the spirit's world, and flesh take on the qualities of soul; and just as the spiritual delights are here in profusion, so too the material delights.

'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 17

Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamored each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardors of the spirit.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 18

As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this Feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 19

In brief, this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends, that it may bring believers into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this center to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord's supper. It attracts confirmation of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 21

Observance of Feast by Groups and Isolated Believers
In reply to your letter of November 8th we feel that all friends, whatever their circumstances, should be encouraged to observe the Nineteen Day Feast. Obviously it can only be an official administrative occasion where there is a Local Spiritual Assembly to take charge of it, present reports to the friends, and receive their recommendations. But groups, spontaneous gatherings of friends, and even isolated believers should certainly remember the day and say prayers together. In the case of a group it may well hold the Feast in the manner in which a Local Spiritual Assembly would do [9.19] so, recognizing of course that it has no official administrative standing.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 1, 1968

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Unity Feast/Joint Feast")

When to Hold the Nineteen Day Feast
The Nineteen Day Feast should be held, preferably, on the first day of the Baha'i month, that is to say, the Baha'i day, beginning at sunset. If this is not possible for some good reason, for example that it clashes with the regular day for a public meeting, then it may be held later, but it must fall within the same Baha'i month and should be on the nearest date.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

You ask if it is within the discretion of a Local Spiritual Assembly to schedule the Feasts at times other than the first day of a Baha'i month, and point out that attendance was very low when Feasts were held in the middle of a

week, but that when held on a Saturday many more of the friends were able to attend. It seems obvious, therefore, that the intent of the Local Assembly, in loving consideration of the members of its community, was to make the participation in a Nineteen Day Feast available to as many of the believers as possible....

On the other hand, since the beloved Guardian expressed a preference, and considered it "most suitable," for the Feast to be held on the first day of each month, the House of Justice hopes that the friends everywhere will aim at scheduling their Nineteen Day Feasts in this way, and that the friends themselves will arrange their personal affairs to be able to attend.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 10, 1985,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 816

As to your questions concerning the times for Feasts and Holy Days: The Baha'i Day is from sunset to sunset, therefore if in summer the sun sets too late to enable the Nineteen Day Feast to be held on the preceding evening, it should be held on the day itself. As long as the meeting begins before sunset it is considered to be held on the day which comes to an end with that sunset. Naturally Nineteen Day Feasts should be held on the first day of the Baha'i month if possible, but if it should be difficult to do so, for example if it coincides with a regular public meeting evening, it is [9.20] permissible to hold it on the following day, i.e. on a succeeding day of the Baha'i month.
Written by the Universal House of Justice, letter dated June 23, 1964,
to a National Spiritual Assembly as cited in an unpublished compilation,
"The Nineteen Day Feast," p. 10

Where to Hold
Civil Area
[The] governing principle is that each local community should hold Nineteen Day Feasts within its own civil area."
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 10, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Outdoors
There is no objection to holding meetings in the open air as long as they are conducted with dignity.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 14, 1941,
in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 28

Area Feasts
Each city will have its own Spiritual Assembly, not a number of district ones. Naturally, district 19-day Feasts can be held where there are very many Baha'is in one city.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 29

We understand and appreciate the problems involved in the holding of Nineteen Day Feasts in the large cities such as New York and Los Angeles and we have no

objection to your Assembly authorizing the Local Assembly to provide for the holding of the Feast in different localities as an experiment, if the Local Assembly so wishes, bearing in mind the following precautions:

The tendency in metropolitan areas is towards segregation, and therefore the Local Assembly should be alert to prevent a similar pattern developing in Baha'i meetings by reason of the location of the Feast.

The Local Assembly should be watchful that neither the unity of the community nor control by the Local Assembly is dissipated by this practice.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 23, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If found desirable, the Spiritual Assembly could authorize the holding of separate Nineteen Day Feasts in several sub-units. In such a decentralized system, the Local Spiritual Assembly would have to provide for the overall coordination of the efforts of the friends in all sub-units of the city.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 20, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[9.21] Holding of Feasts in a Church or Other Religious Building
Generally there is no objection to holding...Baha'i functions in places or facilities owned and operated by non-Baha'i religious bodies, provided such use does not tend to identify the Faith, in the eyes of the public, with other religions.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 3, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Organization of the Feast
As to your question concerning Baha'i feasts, Shoghi Effendi strongly feels that on such occasions the friends should emphasize both the spiritual and the administrative elements. For these are equally essential to the success of every Baha'i festival. To maintain the right balance between them is, therefore, the duty and responsibility of every individual Baha'i or group.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 24

In a general letter issued to Local Spiritual Assemblies several years ago, it was pointed out that the Guardian instructs that the Nineteen Day Feast be held according to the following program: the first part, entirely spiritual in character, is devoted to readings from Baha'i Sacred Writings; the second part consists of general consultation on the affairs of the Cause, at which time the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities to the community, asks for suggestions and consultation, and also delivers messages received from the Guardian and the National Assembly. The third part is the material feast and social meeting of all the friends.
Statement of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States,
in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 23

In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi referred to the above

statement of the National Spiritual Assembly: Regarding the nature of the Nineteen Day Feasts, the Guardian feels that the excellent statement on their nature, function and purpose published in one of the recent issues of the News Letter is so comprehensive and faithful in its presentation that he does not find it necessary to restate and enlarge upon the matter. He has no objection, however, if you feel the need to elaborate the thought expressed in that statement, stressing particularly the spiritual, administrative and social aspects of this vital Baha'i institution.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 23

Regarding changing the order of the Feast, it is clear from Shoghi Effendi's instructions that the Nineteen Day Feast program should [9.22] start with the spiritual part, and not with the social part, which includes refreshments, or breaking bread together.... However, if it is found that some sort of association among the friends or the serving of food and refreshments will be helpful, if this takes place at the outset, there is no objection to this practice, provided it is clear that it is not part of the Feast.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 23, 1985,
to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

We can understand the desire of some of the friends to provide a warm welcome at the Feasts to newly declared believers and particularly youth, and we see no objection to the Assembly giving a reception before the actual Feast to achieve this purpose. As the Feast is frequently held in the evening, the Assembly might consider it desirable to arrange for the believers to have a light evening meal together before the Feast is held or it could, for example, arrange for social activities of an appropriate kind while the friends are gathering prior to the actual commencement of the Nineteen Day Feast. This should not, however, take the place of the social part of the Feast itself.
Written by the Universal House of Justice, letter dated January 21, 1973,
to the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land,
in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

The Devotional Aspect
A good part of the feast must of course be devoted to the reading of the Holy Words. For it is through them that the friends can get the inspiration and the vision they need for the successful accomplishment of their work for the Cause.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 24

During the devotional part of the 19 Day Feast any part of the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and the Master can be read, also from the Bible and Qur'an, as these are all sacred scriptures. This part of the meeting need not be confined to prayers, though prayers can and should be read during it.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 29

The Feast is opened with devotional readings, that is to say prayers and meditations, from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and the Master. Following this, passages may be read from other Tablets, from the Holy Scriptures of previous Dispensations, and from the writings of the Guardian. It is clear, however, that the beloved Guardian would not wish his own words to be read as part of an arranged devotional program in which they would be interspersed [9.23] among the words of Holy Scriptures. In other words, at the Nineteen Day Feast, where the words of the Guardian are to be read they should follow any selections from the Scriptures and not be mixed with them.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 25, 1965

The Administrative and Consultative Aspects
The chief opportunity which the friends have for discussion on administrative questions is during the Nineteen Day feasts, at which time the members of the Assembly can meet with the body of the believers and discuss in common the affairs of the Cause, and suggest new policies and methods.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 27

There is a time set aside at the Nineteen Day Feasts for the community to express its views and make suggestions to its assembly; the assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated June 30, 1949, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism, acknowledging, as a matter of principle, that "it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community." Correspondingly, the Assembly has the duty "to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them.'

Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, local or national, or to a Counselor or Auxiliary Board member, there are specific occasions for the airing of one's views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Baha'i is the Nineteen Day Feast which, "besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Baha'i community." At the same time, Shoghi Effendi's advice, as conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point that "all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body [9.24] should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community.'

The Universal House of Justice,
Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 24-25

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Feast Recommendations and Communications'; Chapter 4, section entitled "Criticism")

We note from reading your minutes that the enthusiasm of some of the new believers is being tested by the reading of long, wordy letters at Nineteen Day Feasts, and we think that something should be done about this. While it is important that the believers be informed about important messages from the Holy Land and other important items, it is true that the reading of messages at Nineteen Day Feasts can become a very boring and trying experience particularly for new believers not acquainted with many aspects of Baha'i administration. We think you should consider other ways and means by which believers could be informed of vital and necessary information, such as through bulletins, institutes and other meetings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated September 6, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

Chairing the Feast
The Chairman of the local assembly is, if present, the logical and appropriate person to take charge of the consultation period between the assembly and the community members at the Nineteen Day Feast.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Unfolding Destiny, p. 450

Occasionally the Assembly may find it necessary or appropriate to delegate the responsibility of chairing the Feast to another member or to request a person who is not an Assembly member to chair the Feast.

It is helpful to have a chair who is pleasant and cheerful and who can keep the discussion focused and moving, keep strong personalities from dominating the consultation, and give everyone who wishes an opportunity to speak.

Translation
The Nineteen Day Feasts and other official gatherings of the friends should be conducted in whatever is the conventional local language. This does not mean, of course, that at such gatherings some of the readings could not be in the language of the [9.25] immigrants, or that, if these friends so wish, some classes and conferences may not be held and conducted in their own language for their benefit. The essential thing is, as stated above, to promote the integration of the immigrants into the community and avoid feelings of estrangement or disunity on account of language.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 10, 1982, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

The Local Spiritual Assembly...is correct in its decision to conduct the Nineteen Day Feasts in Spanish and to not translate the proceedings in Persian, especially in view of the fact that some of the Spanish friends are becoming

alienated from the community. Although the Iranian believers should make every effort to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts, they should not expect such meetings to be conducted in Persian. They should try to learn Spanish, particularly if they are planning to make their home in Spain. There is no objection, however, to Persian friends if they so wish having special meetings for fellowship and deepening conducted in Persian.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 6, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast"

(See also Chapter 8, Section entitled "Integration of Persian Baha'is")

The Social Aspect
When they gather in this meeting, all those present must turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abha, and from their hearts supplicate, invoke and entreat toward the lofty throne, beg of God's forgiveness for all shortcomings, read the teachings and arise to His service.

Then spread the feast and give refreshments. Assuredly great results will be the outcome of such meetings. Material and spiritual benefits will be assured. All who are present will be intoxicated with the breezes of the Love of God, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit will with tremendous power inspire the hearts.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 22

Attendance and Participation Attendance Encouraged
In regard to the Nineteen Day feasts, Shoghi Effendi is of the opinion that the believers should be impressed with the importance of attending these gatherings which, in addition to their spiritual significance, constitute a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.

[9.26] No radical action, such as the expulsion of any believer from the community, should, however, be taken in case anyone fails to attend these feasts. It is for every individual...conscience and responsibility.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 25

Regarding the Nineteen Day Feasts; these are not strictly obligatory, but the believers should endeavor to regularly attend them, mainly for the following two reasons: First, because they foster the spirit of service and fellowship in the community, and secondly, in view of the fact that they afford the believers a splendid opportunity to fully discuss the affairs of the Cause and to find ways and means for continued improvement in the conduct of Baha'i activities.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 30, 1936, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

Isolated believers and the members of groups may also, of course, attend the

Nineteen Day Feasts of communities when they wish to.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 23, 1985, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

Children of Baha'i Parents
Since children of Baha'i parents are considered to be Baha'is, they are to be encouraged to attend all Feasts, there to share the reading of the Writings and prayers and be bathed in the spirit of the community. It is the hope of the House of Justice that every Feast will be a feast of love when the children will give and receive the tangible affection of the community and its individual members.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 28, 1977, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Behavior of Children'; Chapter 6, Section entitled "Status of Children and Youth")

Children of Non-Baha'i Parents
Concerning your inquiry asking if children under fifteen of non-Baha'i parents could attend Nineteen Day Feasts or other events held exclusively for Baha'is when the children consider themselves as Baha'is, such children may be permitted to attend Baha'i functions provided their parents have given their consent. This applies only, of course, to children under the age of fifteen years.
Letter written by the Universal House of Justice, dated August 4, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

[9.27] Youth
Paralleling the growth of his inner life through prayer, meditation, service, and study of the teachings, Baha'i youth have the opportunity to learn in practice the very functioning of the Order of Baha'u'llah. Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Baha'i consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action. Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind, and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision. In this field Baha'i youth may demonstrate the efficiency, the vigor, the access of unity which arise from true consultation and, by contrast, demonstrate the futility of partisanship, lobbying, debate, secret diplomacy, and unilateral action which characterize modern affairs.
The Universal House of Justice, June 10, 1966, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 96

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Status of Children and Youth")

Visitors
Any Baha'i may attend a Feast, a local Baha'i, a Baha'i from out of town, certainly an isolated Baha'i in the neighborhood.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 27, 1957,
in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p.33

As to visitors to a Nineteen Day Feast, Baha'is from anywhere in the world should of course be warmly welcomed, and may take part in consultation. However, only members of the local community can vote on recommendations to the Local Spiritual Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 1, 1968

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Checking Credentials")

Behavior of Children
Further to the letter we wrote on its behalf on 28 June 1977, the House of Justice has instructed us to say that children should be trained to understand the spiritual significance of the gatherings of the followers of the Blessed Beauty, and to appreciate the honor and bounty of being able to take part in them, whatever their outward form may be. It is realized that some Baha'i observances are lengthy and it is difficult for very small children to remain quiet for so long. In such cases one or other of the parents may have to miss part of the meeting in order to care for the child. The Spiritual [9.28] Assembly can also perhaps help the parents by providing for a children's observance, suited to their capacities, in a separate room during part of the community's observance. Attendance at the whole of the adult celebration thus becomes a sign of growing maturity and a distinction to be earned by good behavior.

In any case, the House of Justice points out that parents are responsible for their children and should make them behave when they attend Baha'i meetings. If children persist in creating a disturbance they should be taken out of the meeting. This is not merely necessary to ensure the properly dignified conduct of Baha'i meetings but is an aspect of the training of children in courtesy, consideration for others, reverence, and obedience to their parents.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 14, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Sale of Items During Feast
As to the sale of items during the Nineteen Day Feast, we leave this to your discretion, bearing in mind that the principle purpose of holding the Feast should not be diverted and that pressure should not be placed upon the friends to participate in the purchase of articles offered for sale. Neither should it become an habitual thing. It would be better if the sale was not conducted during the Feast itself, but held at a separate time before or after the Feast proper.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 1, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly, as cited in Lights of Guidance, par. 827

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Promotion of Personal Businesses or Services")

Music

With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that not only he approves of such a practice, but thinks it even advisable that the believers should make use, in their meetings, of hymns composed by Baha'is themselves, and also of such hymns, poems and chants as are based on the Holy Words.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 25

Music is permitted during the spiritual part,,or any part,,of the Nineteen Day Feast.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 30, 1952, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

Instrumental music may be used at the Baha'i Feasts.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, August 20, 1956, in Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 33

[9.29] Smoking During Feast

In the case of Nineteen Day Feasts or meetings of Assemblies or committees, it is not right that friends who find smoking offensive should be made to endure it in Baha'i meetings that they are required or expected to attend. If certain individuals feel that they must smoke, then arrangements, such as a break in the meeting, could be made for their convenience. It would, of course, be entirely inappropriate to smoke during the devotional part of a Feast, or at any other devotional gathering.

The Universal House of Justice, March 4, 1974, in National Baha'i Review, September 1986

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Smoking During Assembly Meetings")

Non-Baha'is

The rule that only Baha'is may take part in Nineteen Day Feasts is not a new one, indeed it was often reiterated by the beloved Guardian. However, when a non-Baha'i does appear at a Feast he should not be asked to leave; rather, the Assembly should omit the consultative part of the Feast, and the non-Baha'i should be made welcome. Of course, if the non-Baha'i is well known to the Baha'is and no hurt feelings would be caused, he might be asked to retire during the consultative part. In general, however, it is much better to avoid such problems where possible, and you seem to have taken the wisest course during your friends" last visit by taking them out for the evening, so avoiding the problem.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 24, 1970, to an individual believer

During the period of consultation the Baha'is should be able to enjoy perfect freedom to express their views on the work of the Cause, unembarrassed by the feeling that all they are saying is being heard by someone who has not accepted Baha'u'llah and who might, thereby, gain a very distorted picture of the Faith.

It would also be very embarrassing for any sensitive non-Baha'i to find himself plunged into the midst of a discussion of the detailed affairs of a Baha'i community of which he is not a part.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 12, 1981, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

If a non-Baha'i does appear at a Nineteen Day Feast he should be made to feel welcome, but a Baha'i should certainly not invite a non-Baha'i to attend.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 23, 1985, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

[9.30] Non-Baha'i Family Members and Persons Close to the Faith
Although it is generally understood that only members of the Baha'i community and visiting Baha'is from other localities may attend Nineteen Day Feasts, the question is frequently asked whether persons close to the Faith and non-Baha'i members of Baha'i families might not be permitted to attend if they leave the room during the consultation period. It is sometimes argued that this privilege will bring these persons closer to the Faith and will dispel any feeling that there are "secrets" in the Faith.

Baha'is should be able to take the necessary time to consult about plans and activities within their community. When visitors are excluded during consultation and are waiting to re-enter the room, the believers, from a sense of courtesy, feel obliged to hurry through the business and cut short the consultation so that their guests may not be kept waiting too long. Concentration on the essential aspects of the Feast is dissipated and sociability becomes the dominant factor. The friends should be sensitive to this and should refrain from inviting non-Baha'i family members or seekers to any portion of the Feast.

Unity Feasts/Joint Feasts
Baha'i communities have come to use the term "Unity Feast" to indicate events which resemble a Nineteen Day Feast but in which the administrative portion is not conducted due to the presence of non-Baha'is or because it is being jointly celebrated by more than one community. It is important to note that such an event is purely social and enjoys no special station in Baha'i community life. A Unity Feast cannot take the place of a Nineteen Day Feast, an Institution of the Faith, which includes the administrative portion as an essential element.

It is not quite correct to say that a Nineteen Day Feast is changed into a Unity Feast as a result of the presence of non-Baha'is. What can happen is that the consultative portion of the Feast has to be postponed....

If it is decided to postpone part or all of the consultative portion of the Feast, the House of Justice states that it is within the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly to decide whether another meeting should be held during the Baha'i month to complete it, or whether it can be postponed until the following Nineteen Day Feast.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated September 5,

1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

With respect to your question asking whether a Local Spiritual Assembly may cancel its Nineteen Day Feast in order to attend Feast in another community, the House of Justice advises [9.31] that the Nineteen Day Feast should not be canceled. However, there is no objection to two or more local communities holding a joint Nineteen Day Feast occasionally, although it is not proper to allow such joint Feasts to be held on a regular basis. If members of a community find that the plan to hold such a joint Feast would produce inconvenience to them, they should take the matter up with their Local Spiritual Assembly.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 26, 1987, to an individual believer, in an unpublished compilation, "The Nineteen Day Feast'

Joint Feasts do not fulfill the purpose of the Nineteen Day Feast in its strict sense, and should not become a regular practice among the Friends.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 15, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in an unpublished compilation "The Nineteen Day Feast'

(See also the Section entitled "Observance of Feast by Groups and Isolated Believers") ie. p. 9.20

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF OTHER RELIGIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Preserving Inherited Cultural Identities

A primary challenge to Baha'is is to preserve and improve those wholesome aspects of tribal and family custom that are in accord with the Baha'i Teachings and to dispense with those that are not.... People everywhere have customs which must be abandoned so as to clear the path along which their societies must evolve towards that glorious, new civilization which is to be the fruit of Baha'u'llah's stupendous Revelation. Indeed, in no society on earth can there be found practices which adequately mirror the standards of His Cause.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan 1996, to the followers of Baha'u'llah in Africa

Baha'is should obviously be encouraged to preserve their inherited cultural identities, as long as the activities involved do not contravene the principles of the Faith. The perpetuation of such cultural characteristics is an expression of unity in diversity. Although most of these festive celebrations have no doubt stemmed from religious rituals in bygone ages, the believers should not be deterred from participating in those in which, over the course of time, the religious meaning has given way to purely culturally oriented practices. For example, Naw-Ruz itself was originally a Zoroastrian religious festival, but gradually its Zoroastrian connotation has almost been forgotten. Iranians, even after their conversion to Islam, have been observing it as a national festival. Now Naw-Ruz [9.32] has become a Baha'i Holy Day and is being

observed throughout the world, but, in addition to the Baha'i observance, many Iranian Baha'is continue to carry out their past cultural traditions in connection with this Feast. Similarly, there are a number of national customs in every part of the world which have cultural rather than religious connotations.

Participation in Other Cultural/Religious Festivals

In deciding whether or not to participate in such traditional activities, the Baha'i must guard against two extremes. The one is to disassociate themselves needlessly from harmless cultural observances and thus alienate themselves from their non-Baha'i families and friends; the other is to continue the practice of abrogated observances of previous dispensations and thus undermine the independence of the Baha'i Faith and create undesirable distinctions between themselves and their fellow-Baha'is. In this connection there is a difference between what Baha'is do among themselves and what they do in companionship with their non-Baha'i friends and relations. For example, in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian there appears the following guidance:

As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers, it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the Friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Year, and to have their festival gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Ruz.

Attending Other Religious Ceremonies

Further, there is no objection for Baha'is to attend religious marriage ceremonies of their friends and relatives or take part in festivities usually connected with these events, provided that in doing so they do not contravene Baha'i Law. For example, if consuming alcoholic beverages is a part of such activities, the Baha'is, of course, would be obliged to refrain from partaking of such drinks.

There are some exclusive religious ceremonies in which Baha'is should not participate, in order to safeguard the independence of the Faith. In this regard, the beloved Guardian has given the following advice to an individual believer: "In these days the friends should, as much as possible, demonstrate through their deeds the independence of the Holy Faith of God, and its freedom from the customs, rituals and practices of a discredited and abrogated past." In observing this principle, the House of Justice advises the Baha'is to maintain a balance between their adherence to the Cause and [9.33] obedience to its laws on the one hand, and their role in society on the other. When an individual becomes a Baha'i he acquires, as you are aware, a wider loyalty to the Manifestations of God. Having found this new way of life, he should be careful not to isolate himself from his family and his people, and he should show respect for his former religion. The Baha'is should, of course, avoid performing any acts which could be considered as implying their membership in another religion or which are contrary to Baha'i Principles. There is a clear distinction between participating in festive and cultural events, as opposed to performing religious ceremonies and rituals.

It should also be remembered that the weaning away of the Baha'is from customs and traditions, which have been established among communities for centuries, takes time and is a gradual process. Therefore, while the National Assembly should avoid rigidity in these matters, it should also not compromise when the interests of the Faith and its integrity and independence are at stake.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 26, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

SPECIAL EVENTS

Dates and Descriptions
* World Religion Day (3rd Sunday of January)
United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International
Peace (March 8th)
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21st)
World Health Day (April 7th)
World Environment Day (June 5th)
* Race Unity Day (2nd Sunday of June)
International Literacy Day (September 8th)
International Day of Peace (3rd Tuesday of September)
World Habitat Day (1st Monday of October)
World Food Day (October 16th)
United Nations Day (October 24th)
Universal Children's Day (November 20th)
Human Rights Day (December 10th)

* Days established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

World Religion Day
World Religion Day was initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly. It is observed by Baha'is in the United States, and increasingly by people around the globe. Baha'is may celebrate the day by hosting discussions, conferences, and other events which [9.34] foster understanding and communication between the followers of all religions.

The purpose of World Religion Day is to call attention to the harmony which exists among the spiritual principles of the world's religions and to emphasize that religion has always been the source of unity.

Your letter of September 30, with the suggestion that "there should be one day in the year in which all of the religions should agree" is a happy thought, and one which persons of good will throughout the world might well hail. However, this is not the underlying concept of World Religion Day, which is a celebration of the need for and the coming of a world religion for mankind, the Baha'i Faith itself. Although there have been many ways of expressing the meaning of this celebration in Baha'i communities in the United States, the Day was not meant primarily to provide a platform for all religions and their emergent ecumenical ideas. In practice, there is no harm in the Baha'i communities" inviting the persons of other religions to share their platforms

on this Day, providing the universality of the Baha'i Faith as the fulfillment of the hopes of mankind for a universal religion are clearly brought forth.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 22, 1968, to a Local Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1710

Race Unity Day
Race Unity Day was inaugurated in 1957 by the National Spiritual Assembly to promote racial harmony and understanding. It is observed on the second Sunday in June. Originally called Race Amity Day, the name was changed to Race Unity Day in 1965. The purpose of the day is to focus attention on the most challenging moral issue facing this country„racial prejudice.

United Nations International Day of Peace
In 1959 the National Spiritual Assembly initiated the commemoration of a World Peace Day to call attention to the urgent need for the establishment of a lasting peace among the nations of the world. This observance was held on the third Sunday in September.

On November 30, 1981, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the third Tuesday in September as International Day of Peace, stating that it should be "devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideas of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.'

In 1985 the National Spiritual Assembly decided to support the United Nations observance and forgo promoting a separate World Peace Day.

SUGGESTED READINGS

[9.35] God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi

'Abdu'l-Baha, The Center of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, H. M. Balyuzi

The Bab: The Herald of the Day of Days, H. M. Balyuzi

Baha'u'llah, The King of Glory, H. M. Balyuzi

Days to Remember, a compilation, B. Forghani

Nabil's Narrative, Abridged, Nabil-i-Azam

The Master in Akka, Myron Phelps, 1985

Hour of the Dawn: The Life of the Bab, Mary Perkins, 1987

The Nineteen Day Feast
Baha'i Meetings/The Nineteen Day Feast, compiled by the Universal House of Justice

For Children
The Ayyam-i-Ha Camel, Cher Holt-Fortin, 1989

APPENDIX A
[9.36] SAMPLE LETTER (LETTERHEAD OF THE LSA)

Date

To Whom It May Concern

Dear Friends,

Among your student population are members of the Baha'i Faith on whose behalf we respectfully request permission for them to be excused from school on the Baha'i Holy Days. These special days are associated with significant events in the life of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith, and the Bab, its Herald.

October 20 Birth of the Bab
November 12 Birth of Baha'u'llah
March 21 Naw-Ruz [Baha'i New Year]
April 21 Ridvan Festival [Baha'u'llah's Declaration] First Day
April 29 Ninth Day of the Ridvan Festival
May 2 Twelfth Day of the Ridvan Festival
May 23 Declaration of the Bab
May 29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah
July 9 Martyrdom of the Bab

These Holy Days are observed only on the days of the commemoration whether they fall on a weekend or a weekday. The children are expected to make up any work they may have missed as a result of their being excused from school for their religious observances. It may interest you that the essential message of Baha'u'llah is that of unity. The Baha'i Faith, the most recent of the world's independent religions, has more than five million believers who can be found around the globe in more than 230 countries and dependent territories. According to the 1992 Britannica Book of the Year, it is second only to Christianity in its geographic spread. We hope favorable consideration will be given to this request that the students in your charge who are members of the Baha'i Faith be excused from school when the Holy Days noted above fall on a day when classes are in session.

Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of _____

Signature

10„THE BAHA'I FUNDS

[10.1] THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE BAHA'I FUNDS
The progress and promotion of the Cause of God depend on material means.
Baha'u'llah, Huqúqu'llah: The Right of God, p. 1

Nature of the Funds
Spiritual Activity and Material Means
Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one True God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance.... When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of

water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man's thirst....
'Abdu'l-Baha, Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude,
pp. 7-8

And as the progress and execution of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of Local as well as National Spiritual Assemblies, a Baha'i Fund be established....
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 41

Funds Established by 'Abdu'l-Baha
The institutions of the local and national Funds, that are now the necessary adjuncts to all Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, have not only been established by 'Abdu'l-Baha in the Tablets He revealed to the Baha'is of the Orient, but their importance and necessity have been repeatedly emphasized by Him in His utterances and writings.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 6

[10.2] Huququ'llah„A Separate Institution
The payment of Huququ'llah is one of the essential spiritual obligations of the people of Baha which has been revealed in the Most Holy Book by the Pen of Glory. Therefore the friends should separate the account of Huququ'llah from that of their other contributions. Thus they must first settle their obligations concerning Huququ'llah, then they may make other contributions at their own discretion, inasmuch as the disposition of the funds of the Huququ'llah is subject to decision by the Authority in the Cause to which all must turn, whereas the purposes of contributions to the other Funds may be determined by the donors themselves.
From the Universal House of Justice, in Huququ'llah: The Right of God, p. 34

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Huququ'llah")

Purpose of the Funds
To Promote the Spread and Development of the Cause
All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country.... The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Baha'i institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 41-42

That you may reinforce this Teaching Campaign„so vitally needed in these days„and conduct, properly and efficiently, the rest of your manifold activities, spiritual as well as humanitarian, it is urgently necessary to establish that Central Fund, which if generously supported and upheld by individual friends and local Assemblies, will soon enable you to execute your plans with promptness and vigor.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 6, 1923,
Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 3

To Address the Needs of Humanity
It is to a greater realization of the privilege and responsibility of supporting the multiple activities of our beloved Faith that we call you all at this critical time in world history, and remind you that to support the Baha'i funds is an integral part of the Baha'i way of life. The need is not only now, but throughout the years to come, until our exertions, reinforced by confirmations from on high, will have overcome the great perils now facing mankind and have [10.3] made this world another world„a world whose splendor and grace will surpass our highest hopes and greatest dreams.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 3, 1985, to the Baha'is of the World

Our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting once and for all time the burden of hunger and misery from mankind, for it is only through the system of Baha'u'llah„Divine in origin„that the world can be gotten on its feet and want, fear, hunger, war, etc. be eliminated.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 8, 1947,
Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 12

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Ways of Giving to Charity," and also Chapter 13, Section entitled "Social and Economic Development")

Requirements of the Cause Take Precedence Over Individual Needs
It should be emphasized and clearly understood by the friends that the national interests and requirements of the Cause take absolute precedence over individual and private needs. It is the duty of the N.S.A. to so dispose of the national fund as not to allow the national interests of the Faith to be jeopardized by individual considerations that are obviously transient when compared to the lasting interests of the Cause of God. In rare and exceptional cases, when a believer has absolutely no other means of material sustenance, the N.S.A. may either contribute towards his expenses from the national fund, or make a special appeal to the body of the believers to that effect. It is for the family, the civil community and the Local Assembly to administer to such local and private needs of the individual. But in case none of these sources has the means to do so, the N.S.A. may, if it is convinced of the gravity, urgency and justice of the case, appropriate a part of its fund for that purpose.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 17, 1937,
Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 14

Major Funds
We therefore appeal to the friends everywhere to exercise the utmost economy in the use of funds and to make those sacrifices in their personal lives which will enable them to contribute their share, according to their means, to the local, national, continental and international funds of the Faith.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated Naw-Ruz, 1979, to the Baha'is of the World

[10.4] The Local Baha'i Fund
It is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of Local as well as National Spiritual Assemblies, a Baha'i Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 41

The beloved Guardian has explained that the general and national interests of the Cause take precedence over local ones; thus contributions to local funds are secondary to those to national funds. However, the stability of the National Assembly rests on the firmness of the Local Spiritual Assemblies, and in the matter of educating the friends in the importance of the fund, it is often most practical and efficacious to concentrate at first on the development of the local funds and the efficient operation of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. Then, once the friends understand the principle, and learn from experience at a local level, they will the more easily understand the importance of the national fund and the work of the National Spiritual Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 7, 1985, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

The National Baha'i Fund
The National Fund must be firmly established, generously supported and universally and continuously upheld, for it is the prerequisite of future progress and achievement.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 25, 1926,
Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 5

Above all he wishes through you to reiterate his wish, already expressed in his recent cable to the N.S.A., that the National Fund, which undoubtedly constitutes the bedrock upon which all the activities of the Cause ultimately rest, should receive the continued and whole-hearted support of all the believers. Both the local Assemblies and the individual believers should realize that unless they contribute regularly and generously to that Fund the progress of the Faith in India and Burma will not only be considerably retarded, but will inevitably come to a standstill. There should be a continual flow of funds to the National Treasury of the N.S.A., if that body wishes to properly administer the manifold and everincreasing activities of the Faith. Every Baha'i, no matter how poor, must realize what a grave responsibility he has to shoulder in this connection, and should have confidence that his spiritual progress as a believer in the World Order of Baha'u'llah will largely depend [10.5] upon the measure in which he proves, in deeds, his readiness to support materially the Divine institutions of His Faith.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 17, 1937,
Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 10

As the activities of the American Baha'i Community expand, and its world-wide prestige correspondingly increases, the institution of the National Fund, the

bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established, acquires added importance, and should be increasingly supported by the entire body of the believers, both in their individual capacities, and through their collective efforts, whether organized as groups or as Local Assemblies.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 29, 1935,
Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 9

The Continental Baha'i Fund
Urge the initiation of five Continental Baha'i Funds which, as they develop, will increasingly facilitate the discharge of the functions assigned to the Boards.... Appeal to the twelve National Assemblies and individuals to ensure a steady augmentation of these Funds through annual assignment in National Budgets and by individual contributions.
Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Baha'i World, p. 59

Nor should the believers, individually or in their Assemblies, forget the vitally important Continental Funds which provide for the work of the Hands of the Cause of God and their Auxiliary Boards.
From the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 20

The Baha'i International Fund
Emergence of independent sovereign state in Holy Land, synchronizing with the rise and consolidation of the Administrative Center of the World Faith of Baha'u'llah of which the establishment of the International Baha'i Council and the construction of the superstructure of the Bab's Sepulcher constitute the initial major evidences, as well as the projected acquisition of extensive properties in close neighborhood of the Most Holy Tomb of Baha and the precincts of the Shrine of Mount Carmel, Haifa, essential to their preservation, resulting from far-reaching changes in the newlyestablished state, demand henceforth reorientation and necessitate increasing financial support by Baha'i National Communities of East and West, through curtailment of national and local budgets. The extent of appropriations from national and local budgets of [10.6] communities in both hemispheres is regarded as a spiritual obligation and left to the discretion of the elected representatives of the believers. Moreover, participation of individual believers, through contributions directly transmitted to the Holy Land are imperative and beyond the scope of the jurisdiction of National and Local Assemblies.
Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Baha'i World, pp. 13-14

The two major financial strongholds upon which the Baha'i World Community must rely are the Cradle of the Faith [Iran] and the Cradle of the Administrative Order [America].
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 31, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It should therefore be the aim of every local and national community to become not only self-supporting, but to expend its funds with such wisdom and economy as to be able to contribute substantially to the Baha'i International Fund....

From the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 20

Would you please remind the believers in your respective communities that in addition to contributing to the International Fund by means of earmarked donations to the National Fund, they can send contributions direct to Haifa. Checks should be made payable to "Baha'i International Fund." This continues the policy established by the beloved Guardian who wrote that participation of individuals through "contributions directly transmitted to the Holy Land" was "imperative and beyond the scope of the jurisdiction of National and Local Assemblies.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 18, 1963, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Arc Projects Fund
The projects under way on this mountain are of profound significance. They represent much more than the erection of buildings to meet the expanding needs of the Baha'i World Center. The call for contributions to the Arc Projects Fund, far from being a diversion of resources which might otherwise be used to help relieve the distress of mankind, offers the followers of Baha'u'llah a providential opportunity to participate in an endeavor which is central to the work of the Faith in eradicating the causes of the apalling suffering now afflicting humanity.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 4, 1994, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

(See also Appendix C, "Building the Arc")

[10.7] PRINCIPLES OF THE FUND
Obligation and Privilege
It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Baha'u'llah who desires to see His cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund.... I cherish the hope that all the friends, realizing the necessity of this measure, will bestir themselves and contribute, however modestly at first, towards the speedy establishment and the increase of that fund.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 41-42

There is a profound aspect to the relationship between a believer and the Fund, which holds true irrrespective of his or her economic condition. When a human soul accepts Baha'u'llah as the Manifestation of God for this age and enters into the divine Covenant, that soul should progressively bring his or her whole life into harmony with the divine purpose,,he becomes a co-worker in the Cause of God and receives the bounty of being permitted to devote his material possessions, no matter how meager, to the work of the Faith.

Giving to the Fund, therefore, is a spiritual privilege, not open to those who have not accepted Baha'u'llah, of which no believer should deny himself. It is both a responsibility and a source of bounty. This is an aspect of the Cause which, we feel, is an essential part of the basic teaching and deepening of new believers. The importance of contributing resides in the degree of sacrifice of

the giver, the spirit of devotion with which the contribution is made and the unity of the friends in this service; these attract the confirmations of God and enhance the dignity and self-respect of the individuals and the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 7, 1985, in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 28

Obligation of Rich and Poor

It is therefore imperative for the individual American believer, and particularly for the affluent, the independent, the comfort-loving and those obsessed by material pursuits, to step forward, and dedicate their resources, their time, their very lives to a Cause of such transcendence that no human eye can even dimly perceive its glory. Let them resolve, instantly and unhesitatingly, to place, each according to his circumstances, his share on the altar of Baha'i sacrifice, lest, on a sudden, unforeseen calamities rob them of a considerable portion of the earthly things they have amassed.
Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith, p. 131

[10.8] Every Baha'i no matter how poor, must realize what a grave responsibility he has to shoulder in this connection, and should have confidence that his spiritual progress as a believer in the World Order of Baha'u'llah will largely depend upon the measure in which he proves, in deeds, his readiness to support materially the divine institutions of His Faith.
Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 68

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Sacrifice")

The House of Justice believes that the financial needs of the Cause should be met by universal participation in giving and urges national and local spiritual assemblies to pursue this goal with vigor and imagination, recalling to the friends the plea of the beloved Guardian to every believer "unhesitatingly to place, each accord-ing to his circumstances, his share on the altar of Baha'i sacrifice." The fact that only we, the Baha'is, can contribute financially to the Cause is both our honor and our challenge.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridvan, 1967, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 109

Only Baha'is in Good Standing May Contribute

We should, I feel, regard it as an axiom and guiding principle of Baha'i administration that in the conduct of every specific Baha'i activity, as different from undertakings of a humanitarian, philanthropic or charitable character, which may in future be conducted under Baha'i auspices, only those who have already identified themselves with the Faith and are regarded as its avowed and unreserved supporters should be invited to join and collaborate. For apart from the consideration of embarrassing complications which the association of non-believers in the financing of institutions of a strictly Baha'i character may conceivably engender in the administration of the Baha'i community of the future, it should be remembered that these specific Baha'i institutions, which should be viewed in the light of Baha'u'llah's gifts bestowed upon the world, can best function and most powerfully exert their

influence in the world only if reared and maintained solely by the support of those who are fully conscious of, and are unreservedly submissive to, the claims inherent in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 182

He wishes me to stress again that under no circumstances should the believers accept any financial help from non-Baha'is for [10.9] use in connection with specific administrative activities of the Faith such as the Temple construction fund, and other local or national Baha'i administrative funds. The reason for this is twofold: first because the Institutions which the Baha'is are gradually building are in the nature of gifts from Baha'u'llah to the world; and secondly the acceptance of funds from non-believers for specific Baha'i use would, sooner or later, involve the Baha'is into unforeseen complications and difficulties with others, and thus cause incalculable harm to the body of the Cause.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 12, 1938,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, pp. 15-16

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Fund Raising,„Sale of Personal Items," and also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Anonymous Contributions")

Withholding the Privilege of Giving
As regards the question of accepting contributions from people whose voting rights are suspended, the Guardian says this is not permissible.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 21, 1953,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 17

It is not permissible for a Baha'i who has been deprived of his administrative rights to contribute to the Baha'i Funds for charitable purposes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 2, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Meaning of Deprivation of Administrative Rights")

Contributions from Children
Any Baha'i can give to the Cause's Funds, adult or child.... Baha'i children have always given to the Cause, everywhere.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 12, 1949,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 16

Contributions from Non-Baha'is
In cases, however, when a friend or sympathizer of the Faith eagerly insists on a monetary contribution for the promotion of the Faith, such gifts should be accepted and duly acknowledged by the elected representatives of the believers with the express understanding that they would be utilized by them only to reinforce that section of the Baha'i Fund exclusively devoted to philanthropic or charitable purposes. For, as the Faith of Baha'u'llah extends in scope [10.10] and in influence, and the resources of Baha'i communities correspondingly multiply, it will become increasingly desirable to

differentiate between such departments of the Baha'i treasury as minister to the needs of the world at large, and those that are specifically designed to promote the direct interests of the Faith itself.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 182

As regards the question of the Baha'i School in India: As this institution is run by Baha'is but for the benefit of both Baha'is and any other group sending its children there, he sees no reason why a school concert should not receive money from the public attending, and use it for the school itself.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 30, 1952,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 16

We are asked to point out that the friends should not solicit contributions from non-Baha'is for the Persian Relief Fund. If such contributions are spontaneously received from non-Baha'is, the Local Assembly should ensure that such funds are spent only for humanitarian purposes.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 18, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

There are, in the judgment of the National Spiritual Assembly, several financial requirements which fit the definition of charitable or humanitarian activities. Operating subsidies for the Baha'i Home and assistance for long-time Baha'i pioneers who are aged or ill and toward whom we owe a moral obligation are two such examples.

If a Local Assembly receives donations from non-Baha'is and does not wish to use them for local charitable purposes, they may forward them to the National Baha'i Fund, and clearly mark the contribution as coming from a non-Baha'i source.

Nature of Giving

The Spiritual Nature of Giving

Many a time hath the court of the All-Merciful been to outward seeming so denuded of the riches of this world that they who lived in close association with Him suffered from dire want. Despite their sufferings, the Pen of the Most High hath, at no time, been willing to refer, nor even to make the slightest allusion, to the things that pertain to this world and its treasures. And if, at any time, any gift were presented to Him, that gift was accepted as a token of His grace unto him that offered it. Should it ever please Us to appropriate to Our own use all the treasures of the earth, to none [10.11] is given the right to question Our authority, or to challenge Our right. It would be impossible to conceive any act more contemptible than soliciting, in the name of the one true God, the riches which men possess.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 201-202

Each and every believer, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting the nation, must arise and ensure, to the full measure of his or her capacity, that continuous and abundant flow of funds into the national Treasury, on which the successful prosecution of the Plan must chiefly depend....

Contributions to this fund constitute...a practical and effective way whereby every believer can test the measure and character of his faith, and to prove in deeds the intensity of his devotion and attachment to the Cause....
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p.11

All the friends of God...should contribute to the extent possible, however modest their offering may be. God doth not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Such contributions must come from all centers and all believers.... O Friends of God! Be ye assured that in place of these contributions, your agriculture, your industry, and your commerce will be blessed by manifold increases, with goodly gifts and bestowals. He who cometh with one goodly deed will receive a tenfold reward. There is no doubt that the living Lord will abundantly confirm those who expend their wealth in His path.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Prayers, p. 84

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by the fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good,,this is the secret of right living.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 11

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Obligation of Rich and Poor")

[10.12] Universal Participation
In that same message [April 1964] we indicated the meaning of universal participation:

...the dedicated effort of every believer in teaching, in living the Baha'i life, in contributing to the Fund, and particularly in the persistent effort to understand more and more the significance of Baha'u'llah's Revelation.

Every believer can contribute to the Fund. Not all believers can give public talks, not all are called upon to serve on administrative institutions. But all can pray, fight their own spiritual battles, and contribute to the Fund. If every believer will carry out these sacred duties, we shall be astonished at the accession of power which will result to the whole body, and which in its turn will give rise to further growth and the showering of greater blessings on all of us.
From the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 37-38

The institution of the National Fund, so vital and essential for the uninterrupted progress of these activities must, in particular, be assured of the wholehearted, the ever-increasing and universal support of the mass of believers, for whose welfare and in whose name these beneficent activities have been initiated and have been conducted. All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate.
Shoghi Effendi, dated August 8, 1957, in Baha'i Funds and Contributions, pp.

Voluntary
I feel urged to remind you of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to everyone that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root of the principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception. While appeals of a general character, carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances, it should be left entirely to the discretion of every conscientious believer to decide upon the nature, the amount, and purpose of his or her contribution for the propagation of the Cause.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 101

Confidential
There is no objection to the Adelaide S.A. keeping a record of the names of contributors, and sums received, but no pressure must ever be brought on the Baha'is to contribute; it must be [10.13] voluntary, and should be considered confidential, unless the friends themselves wish to mention it openly.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 26, 1945,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 11

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Treasurer's Committees and Treasurer's Assistants")

Regularity
The continual expansion of the Faith and the diversification of the activities of Baha'i communities make it more and more necessary for every believer to ponder carefully his responsibilities and contribute as much and as regularly as he or she can.
From the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 19

Sacrifice
Contributing to the Fund is a service that every believer can render, be he poor or wealthy; for this is a spiritual responsibility in which the amount given is not important. It is the degree of the sacrifice of the giver, the love with which he makes his gift, and the unity of all the friends in this service which bring spiritual confirmations.
From the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 19

As to the idea of "giving what one can afford'; this does by no means put a limit or even exclude the possibility of self-sacrifice. There can be no limit to one's contributions to the national fund. The more one can give the better it is, especially when such offerings necessitate the sacrifice of other wants and desires on the part of the donor. The harder the sacrifice the more meritorious will it be, of course, in the sight of God. For after all it is not so much the quantity of one's offerings that matters, but rather the measure of deprivation that such offerings entail. It is the spirit, and not the mere fact of contributing that we should always take into account when we stress the

necessity for a universal and wholehearted support of the various funds of the Cause.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 31, 1935,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, pp. 9-10

As the beloved Guardian wrote in August 1957: "All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate. Upon the degree of self-sacrifice involved in these individual contributions will directly depend the efficacy and the spiritual influence which these nascent administrative institutions, called into being through the [10.14] power of Baha'u'llah, and by virtue of the design conceived by the Center of His Covenant, will exert."
From the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 19

The problem that faces you is not material, but spiritual. In your national Community which enjoys the great prosperity that has been bestowed on your nation as a whole, it seems clear that if every believer contributed to the National Fund it would be possible for you to meet the needs of your budgets even without sacrifice on the part of the friends.... This, however, even though it should provide the funds immediately required, is not enough. The spirit of sacrifice and of whole-hearted devotion to the Cause of Baha'u'llah is far more important, for this will enable the friends to overcome, not only their financial problems, but all the other obstacles that stand in the way of the advance of the redeeming purpose of God.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 31, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Not Borrowing Money to Give
Even though Shoghi Effendi would urge every believer to sacrifice as much as possible for the sake of contributing towards the fund of the National Spiritual Assembly, yet he would discourage the friends to incur debts for that purpose. We are asked to give what we have, not what we do not possess, especially if such an act causes suffering to others. In such matters we should use judgment and wisdom and take into our confidence other devoted Baha'is.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 4, 1932,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 7

Earmarking
Although individual friends and Local Assemblies are absolutely free to specify the object and purpose of their donations to the National Spiritual Assembly, yet, in my opinion, I regard it of the utmost vital importance that individuals, as well as Local Assemblies, throughout the land should, in view of the paramount importance of National Teaching and as an evidence of their absolute confidence in their national representatives, endeavor, however small at first, to contribute freely towards the upkeep and the increase of the National Baha'i Fund, so that the members of the National Assembly may at their full discretion expend it for whatever they deem urgent and necessary.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 54

[10.15] Both orally and in his letters Shoghi Effendi tried to encourage the

friends to contribute to the Central Fund and has made an effort to explain the advantages that we would have in having a large Central Fund and in giving regular appropriations to each of the different activities of the Cause. And yet in spite of that, Shoghi Effendi has expressly stated that the friends are not in the least required to send their contributions unlabelled but are absolutely free to state whether they wish them to go to the central Fund or to some specific fund such as the Temple. And moreover the friends must be assured that funds that are labeled will never be used except for the specified purpose. Mrs....'s aim in that letter is to encourage them to send unlabelled contributions which as long as they do not at all require the funds is quite in conformity with Shoghi Effendi's desire.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated February 19, 1926, to an individual believer

With regard to the National Fund, it must not be felt that the believers are required to send unlabelled contributions to the Fund but that it is only extremely desirable to do so. Individuals are free to specify the purpose of their donations.
Ibid, addendum in the Guardian's handwriting (underlining in the original)

Regarding your question about contributions: it is up to the individual to decide; if he wishes to donate a sum for a specific purpose, he is free to do so; but the friends should recognize that too much labeling of contributions will tie the hands of the Assembly and prevent it from meeting its many obligations in various fields of Baha'i activity.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 23, 1950,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p.12

Whatever is contributed to the National Assembly for a specific purpose should be expended for that purpose only, but I would encourage the friends to send unlabelled contributions in order not to tie the hands of the National Spiritual Assembly although I do not in the least require them to do so. I will pray for your success from all my heart.
Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 15

(See also in this Chapter, Appendix B, "Handling Earmarked Contributions")

[10.16] The Local Spiritual Assembly and the Fund
Responsibilities of the Assembly
While the friends have the sacred obligation and privilege to contribute to the fund, each Local and National Assembly also has the inescapable duty of educating itself and the believers in the spiritual principles related to Baha'i contributions, to devise simple methods to facilitate the flow and receipt of contributions, and to formulate effective procedures to ensure the wise expenditure of the funds of the Faith.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 7, 1985,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 30

In view of the great responsibility placed upon the shoulders of the members of

National Assemblies by those who elect them, we have urged National Assemblies to exercise the greatest care in handling of their National Funds particularly as these funds represent in great part acts of sacrifice on the part of the friends. It is, of course, within your discretion how you delegate the manifold tasks involved in the day-to-day operation of your National Assembly but we earnestly urge you to reconsider the resolutions to which we referred and provide that two signatures be required for the withdrawal of funds, one of which would be that of an office-holder who is a member of your National Assembly.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 26, 1973,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 21

The National Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility to ensure that contributions received are properly receipted, and satisfactory accounts kept of all receipts and disbursements. While the Treasurer normally is the officer in charge of such a sacred obligation, this does not mean that other members are thereby relieved of all responsibility, or are deprived of their right of access to details related to the current operation of the Assembly, in all its aspects. Such right and responsibility vested in the individual members of the Assembly does not vitiate the confidentiality of Baha'i contributions, since the information made available to the Treasurer or other members of the Assembly is to be treated in strict confidence.
Letter written on behalf of he Universal House of Justice,
dated January 11, 1977, in Baha'i Funds and Contributions, pp. 22-23

In the attitudes seen at the National Office, in the appropriations made to committees and other agencies of the National Assembly, in any budgetary assistance given to pioneers and traveling teachers, in the holding of conferences and deepening courses, [10.17] and in all aspects of the work of the Cause for which the National Assembly is responsible, supervision, careful planning and lack of extravagance should be observed and be seen to be upheld.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 25, 1975, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

(See also the booklet Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, pp. 28-32, on the development of the local and national funds of the Faith)

Responsibilities of the Treasurer
Trustworthiness
A primary requisite for all who have responsibility for the care of the funds of the Faith is trustworthiness. This, as Baha'u'llah has stressed, is one of the most basic and vital of all human virtues, and its exercise has a direct and profound influence on the willingness of the believers to contribute to the Fund.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 7, 1985, in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 22

Custodians of God's Trust

It is important for your Assembly, in the future, to explain to persons who are entrusted with the money of the Faith that in view of the National Assembly's obligation to protect Baha'i funds, the Assembly will hold them responsible for all moneys they receive, and they should therefore render proper accounts to the National Spiritual Assembly, be faithful custodians of God's trust, and be assured that such honesty and faithfulness will be richly rewarded from on High.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 18, 1980, in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 23

Specific Duties
The House of Justice has not established any uniform procedure for Baha'i treasurers, since methods of accounting and the laws governing such matters vary considerably from country to country and from one situation to another. It advises that on such technical questions the National Assembly's Treasurer can seek the advice of a professional. The National Spiritual Assembly should, of course, ensure that its books of account are audited annually and for this there is no objection to utilizing the services of a non-Baha'i firm.

In general terms, however, the House of Justice feels that there are certain matters to which National Treasurers should give particular attention.

1. There is the relationship between the National Assembly and the individual believers and local communities. Through whatever correspondence he conducts with contributors to the [10.18] National Fund and with committees which are drawing on the Fund for their work, the National Treasurer can be a powerful influence in establishing links of loving unity within the community.

2. The Treasurer must be sure to render regular and accurate financial statements to the National Spiritual Assembly so that it can properly plan its work within the means available to it.

3. It is the Treasurer's responsibility to prepare the annual financial report in time for the National Spiritual Assembly to consider it before presenting it at Convention. He also has to prepare the annual budget for the consideration and approval of the National Assembly.

4. The Treasurer should carefully monitor the use of the Fund so that he can warn the Assembly in good time if there is danger of over-spending.

5. In bookkeeping, a system must be adopted to ensure that earmarked funds are kept absolutely distinct from those that are at the free disposition of the Assembly, and there should be safeguards to prevent the inadvertent spending of earmarked funds on matters other than those for which they are intended.

6. In addition to keeping accurate records of income and expenditure, the Treasurer should see that the assets of the Assembly are protected and that both assets and liabilities are carefully recorded.

7. The Treasurer should advise the Assembly to set aside sufficient sums on a regular basis to provide for the repair and maintenance of properties owned by

the Faith, so that these can be kept in good condition and so that the normal work of the Cause is not interrupted by sudden requirements of large sums for repairs. Usually the task of maintaining the properties is assigned to a special committee or committees, which should be consulted by the Assembly and can suggest a suitable amount to be set aside annually.

8. While it is within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly to require only one signature on checks drawn on the National Fund, experience has shown that it is better practice to require at least two signatures. This is a protection not only to the Fund itself but also to the Treasurer. The funds of the Faith are a sacred trust, and Assemblies should be meticulous in handling and accounting for them.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 13, 1981,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, pp. 24-25

[10.19] The position of the Treasurer of the Local Spiritual Assembly should be thoroughly understood by everyone in the community. The duties and limits of authority may be described as follows:

The Treasurer has a major responsibility in the community for:
´ Educating the community about the funds
´ Receiving contributions
´ Keeping the accounts
´ Paying the bills
´ Spearheading budgeting process
´ Reporting financial progress at Feasts and other gatherings

The Treasurer performs these duties on behalf of the Assembly. To be effective, the Treasurer must understand that the Baha'i Fund and, indeed, the functions of the Treasurer, are the responsibility of the entire Assembly and not just of the Treasurer alone. The Local Spiritual Assembly as a body should be concerned about the condition of the local Baha'i Fund and consult on ways to make the community aware of the critical importance of the Fund. The Treasurer implements the decisions and policies of the Institution.

The Treasurer also has a responsibility to educate the community about the role the Fund must play in attaining the primary objective of the Faith„the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. In this regard, the functions of the office transcend material considerations. The Treasurer, as the representative of the Assembly, has the responsibility to educate and inspire the friends and emphasize the spiritual importance of the institution of the Baha'i Fund. The friends should understand that their acts of material giving are transformed into the means of spiritual progress, not only for themselves as individuals but also for the community as a whole.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Treasurer's Committees and Treasurer's Assistants")

Presentations to the Community

It is suggested that ways and means be found to make the Nineteen Day Feasts more interesting and a source of inspiration to the friends. For example, Local Assemblies might be assisted in devising more interesting and informative ways of presenting the needs of the Fund.... The Treasurer's Report should be an exciting and stimulating part of each Nineteen Day Feast, and it would certainly be helpful if the local Treasurer had up-to-date information on the status of the National Fund.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 27, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[10.20] The Fund presentation to the community should be designed to:
´ Increase the community's awareness of the spiritual importance of the Fund, and
´ Stimulate universal participation in giving to the Funds.

In addition to the status of the National Fund, the Treasurer's Report for the Nineteen Day Feast may include:
´ The status of the Local Fund
´ Correspondence from the Universal House of Justice or the National Spiritual Assembly
´ The status of any other Funds (Continental, International, etc.) or special appeals when known
´ Inspirational stories and audio-visual presentations
´ Information on estate planning and will preparation

Financial Reports to the Community
The Treasurer could also try to involve the community members by enlisting the aid of other believers, including children and youth. The Treasurer should report the "Beginning Cash Balance," "Contributions," "Disbursements," "Ending Cash Balance," "Outstanding Bills," "Local Participation Percentage," and whether the community has achieved its contributions goal to the Assembly and the community each Baha'i month. Most of these figures are easily gleaned from the monthly totals of the cash journal and can be reported from the "Statement of Cash Receipts and Disbursements" for each Baha'i month. These figures should be recorded in the minutes of the Assembly meeting.

Mid-year (or more often if the Assembly desires) the Treasurer should report year-to-date receipts and disbursements compared with the amount budgeted. Most of the figures for this report are easily found by checking the year-to-date totals in the cash journal and by referring to the community's budget.

Reports to the National Spiritual Assembly
Annually, the Assembly must prepare and submit the Local Spiritual Assembly's "Financial Report to the National Spiritual Assembly." The report should show actual receipts and disbursements for the last fiscal year and include the budget for the new fiscal year. Although the Treasurer plays an important role in developing this report and the budget, final preparation of both rests with the entire Assembly. The report should be near completion by March, be affirmed by the Assembly by May, and sent to the National Spiritual Assembly Office of

the Treasurer.

Care in Handling Funds
Stewardship of Baha'i Funds
(See also in this Chapter, Sections entitled "Custodians of God's Trust" and "Trustworthiness")

[10.21] Investing Funds
The Assembly is the trustee of the funds in its care, and its primary concern in investing such funds should be to try to preserve their real value. Obtaining a good income from such investments is also desirable, but is a secondary consideration and should not be sought if this would endanger the value of the principal. This is especially true in the case of earmarked funds, where the Assembly has a duty to the donor or donors to preserve the value of the fund until such time as it can be used for the designated purpose. In such a case, when the value of the currency is itself depreciating, one method of upholding the real value of the earmarked fund is to add back to the principal all income earned on it, even if the donor has not specifically earmarked the income to be earned on his contribution.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 19, 1985,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 26

Handling Earmarked Contributions
(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Budgeting, Accounting and Procedures," and also in this Chapter, Appendix B, "Handling Earmarked Contributions")

Individual and Collective Contributions Are Distinct
Care must be taken that the purpose of earmarking is not defeated. Thus the use of earmarked funds to defray the expense of particular items in your budget has the effect of reducing, pro tanto [to that extent], the amount of general contributions needed to be applied to the budget. In effect, this practice may result in there being no difference between an earmarked contribution and one not earmarked. For example: A friend may earmark a contribution for the Baha'i International Fund. To apply this to the contribution to the Baha'i International Fund from your National Fund would be wrong unless the earmarking so specifies. Funds earmarked merely to the Baha'i International Fund should be sent to the World Center in addition to whatever contribution is made from the National Fund.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 29, 1971,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 21

The principle involved is as follows: The Guardian feels that your Assembly when allocating its annual budget, and having stipulated what sum is for the purposes of the International Center of the Faith, should immediately pigeon-hole that sum to be at the Guardian's disposal. Any moneys received as contributions from the Baha'is for the International Center should not be

credited to [10.22] this account which represents a national joint contribution, and has nothing to do with individual or local contributions forwarded to the World Center in your care.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 20, 1954,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 12

The Guardian has noticed that the National Assembly plans to make a contribution...to the Australia and New Zealand Assembly for their Temple. He wishes to know whether this is the contribution that Mrs. Collins has made for that purpose, or whether this is another contribution given from the funds of the National Assembly. If it is Mrs. Collins" contribution, then it should naturally be given under her name.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 15, 1956,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 13

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Four Major Funds," and also in this Chapter, Appendix B, "Handling Earmarked Contributions")

Commingling Personal and Baha'i Funds
The Treasurer of a Baha'i Spiritual Assembly, even if momentarily holding Baha'i funds in his own name, must take the greatest care never to commingle his own funds with those of the Faith or to leave the funds of the Faith subject to the vagaries of fortune which can afflict any one of us.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 8, 1971,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 21

Misuse of Funds
The distressing problems of the misuse of funds described in your letter can be resolved in the long run only through a process of loving education of the friends. It is through the dissemination among the believers of appropriate texts from the Writings of the Faith, through carefully prepared articles on this subject based on the Holy Texts and published in your newsletter, and through talks at conferences, summer schools and other Baha'i gatherings, as well as discussion of these fundamental issues with the friends at such meetings, that you will be able to gradually attain your objective.

As to the immediate problems you cite in your letter: You should consider each case separately, arrange for representatives of the National Assembly to meet with that individual, explain lovingly to him such standards as the sanctity of Baha'i funds, the importance of integrity and honesty in handling money entrusted to one's care, and the test inherent in man's desire to possess material things.

[10.23] Arrangements could also be made at such a meeting for the individual to pay his debt in installments he will be reasonably able to meet.

Your Assembly is quite right in stating that if there is a trend to misuse Baha'i funds, and this trend is left unchecked, the practice can become contagious and do harm to the Faith and to the individuals concerned. However, wisdom and understanding are important, so that best results can be achieved.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 18, 1980, in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 23

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Handling Violations of Baha'i Law," and also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Duties of Officers-Treasurer," and also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Dissatisfaction with Officers," and also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Importance of Regular Attendance")

Treasurer's Committees and Treasurer's Assistants

Regarding the local funds, it is suggested that until such time as the friends have developed the habit of contributing regularly and freely, any Local Spiritual Assembly which has a large community might appoint a small committee to assist the local Treasurer in the discharge of his responsibilities. Such committees could be appointed after consultation with the Auxiliary Board member or assistant for the area. Great care must be taken in the appointment of the members of the committees; they must be both trustworthy and conscientious and must be imbued with awareness of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of contributions to the funds. It is envisaged that these Treasury Committees would serve a number of functions:

* To render general assistance to the Treasurer, as needed; for example, members of the committee could assist with issuing receipts or keeping accounts.

* To arrange for inspirational talks and discussions at Nineteen Day Feasts or at specially called meetings for the education of the friends in the spiritual and practical importance of contributing to the funds.

* To receive donations of money on behalf of the local Treasurer and transmit these to him.

* To receive gifts of produce and handicrafts. The committee would be responsible for arranging for their sale and for handing over the proceeds to the local Treasurer.

* [10.24] To receive from the friends written pledges of their hope or intention of making a contribution to the local or national funds, whether in cash or in kind, and to assist in collecting them.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 31

As another option, local assemblies may wish to appoint Treasurer's assistants. Any assistants appointed must be both trustworthy and conscientious and must be imbued with awareness of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of contributions to the funds.

Budgeting, Accounting and Auditing Procedures

Budgeting

The financial questions that confront the Cause are all very pressing and important. They need a judicious administration and a wise policy. We should study the needs of the Cause, find the fields which will give the greatest yield and then appropriate the necessary funds.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 19, 1929,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 13

He urges your Assembly, in addition to expediting the Temple work as much as reasonably possible, to carefully supervise expenditures and prevent the architect from getting extravagant ideas. It is only through a wise economy, the elimination of nonessentials, concentration on essentials and a careful supervision, that the Guardian himself has been able to build the Shrine and the International Archives at the World Center, and surround the Holy Places here by what appears in the eyes of the public to be lavish gardens, but are in reality the result of rigorous and economical planning. This will not only ensure that the budget of the Temple is adhered to, but will be a salutary example to the African Baha'is, who must not be led to believe that because the Baha'is of the world are building for them a Temple in the heart of their homelands, our resources are infinite and that the affairs of the Cause can be supported from abroad. The more they see that economy and intelligent supervision of the work is carried on in connection with their own Temple, the more they will be encouraged to feel some financial responsibility toward the National Body. Having very little themselves, it is a delicate matter, and as he already informed your Assembly, under no circumstances should a heavy budget be imposed upon such weak communities, and thus [10.25] discourage them from the outset, or lead them to believe that like the Missions, our money comes from abroad.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated August 8, 1957,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, pp. 14-15

I would, however, at this early state of our work, strongly urge, nay entreat, the friends not to dissipate their efforts, but to seek, after frank, mature and continuous deliberation to arrive at a common conclusion as to the most urgent requirements and needs of the hour, and having unified their views to strive to uphold and enforce them with promptitude, wholeheartedness and understanding.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated January 16, 1925,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 4

Budgeting is the making of a plan of systematic spending of anticipated income in light of local, national and international needs.

The purposes of a budget are:
A) To establish financial goals for the community, and

B) to achieve a balance between the financial requirements of the community for its operation and growth, and a realistic assessment of its ability to meet these expenses.

Budgeting is the responsibility of the Spiritual Assembly. The Treasurer can be of great assistance by providing details of the last year's income and expenses, the needs of the National Fund, Continental Fund and International Fund, and by drawing up a proposed budget for the further review of the Spiritual Assembly.

Budgets should be prepared prior to the beginning of the Baha'i year,„using either the fiscal year of the National Spiritual Assembly (May 1-April 30) or the period March 21 to March 20.

When the budget has been set, the National Spiritual Assembly asks that it be included in the Financial Report to the National Spiritual Assembly and sent to the Office of the National Treasurer as soon as possible.

Fiscal Year
The fiscal year for accounting purposes of the National Spiritual Assembly is May 1-April 30.

Accounting
A Local Spiritual Assembly should adopt a method of bookkeeping and a schedule for the length of time to retain the original documents of all financial transactions. These documents include receipts for contributions, bank statements, invoices, canceled checks, promissory notes, etc. A recommended retention schedule can be found in Stewardship and Development: a Desktop Reference for Spiritual Assemblies and Treasurers.

[10.26] A well-organized accounting system will aid in the efficient use of community resources and the development of a systematic method whereby important goals can be achieved consistently.

Auditing Procedures
An annual audit of the Treasurer's books is an important obligation of the Local Spiritual Assembly. At the end of each year (or more often if warranted), the Assembly should appoint two individuals or hire the services of a certified public accounting firm to carry out the audit.

The function of a professional auditor is by its nature a confidential one and the fact that the auditor will have to see the records of contributions does not violate the principle of confidentiality.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 26, 1982,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 25

For additional details on accounting, budgeting and auditing, a booklet entitled Stewardship and Development: a Desktop Reference for Spiritual Assemblies and Treasurers can be obtained from the Baha'i Distribution Service.

Confidentiality of Financial Records
The financial records are the property of the Assembly and, as such, are available to that body at any time. These records are held in confidence within the institution. No individual is given access to them except with the permission of the Local Spiritual Assembly.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Confidentiality")

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Responsibilities of the Assembly")

Tax Exempt Status

See Appendix C

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Responsibilities of the Treasurer„Specific Duties")

Fund Education
We feel that each National Assembly should carefully and regularly consult on this vital aspect of the education of the friends, spare no effort and lose no opportunity in bringing to their attention the needs of the hour.

For example, where land is difficult to obtain, or where funds for the purchase of endowments are not available, the friends should be appealed to in a dignified and effective manner to donate from their own land for the use of Baha'i institutions.

In the construction of local Baha'i centers, the National Assembly should carefully devise methods of appealing to the friends [10.27] to contribute manpower or local materials for the construction of such buildings.

If ready cash is not available for contributions to the Fund, the National Assembly should guide the friends in ways they could raise funds by a collective effort to cultivate a piece of land, by contributing cash crops, livestock or home-made dishes, sweetmeats, or handicrafts.

Special meetings could also be arranged for the sale of such contributions in kind.

In the matter of attendance of delegates at Conventions, the desirability of the friends themselves being self-supporting should be pointed out by the National Assembly.

If a delegate cannot pay his own expenses in attending the Convention, the Local Assembly or the believers in the electoral unit from which the delegate comes should be encouraged by the National Assembly to defray such expenses, so that only when funds are unavailable from those sources, the National Assembly is approached to consider offering financial assistance.

The same principle holds true about other activities, such as attendance at Institutes, Conferences and Summer Schools.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 9, 1967

Conditions vary from country to country and therefore, in educating the believers and developing the Fund, each National Spiritual Assembly needs to tailor its actions to the conditions of its area of jurisdiction.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 30

Assemblies should take the members of their communities into their confidence, and regularly inform them of the uses to which the fund is put and the projects for which money is needed.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 32

(See also Chapter 14, Section entitled "Financial Requirements")

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Responsibilities of the Treasurer")

Teaching and Deepening New Believers
In the visits made to the villages, the visiting teacher meets with the local communities to give them basic Baha'i knowledge, such as living the Baha'i life, the importance of teaching, prayer, fasting, Nineteen Day Feasts, Baha'i elections, and contributions to the Fund. The question of contributions to the Fund is of utmost importance, [10.28] so that the new believers may quickly feel themselves to be responsible members of the community.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 34-35

Every Baha'i, no matter how poor, must realize what a grave responsibility he has to shoulder in this connection, and should have confidence that his spiritual progress as a believer in the World Order of Baha'u'llah will largely depend upon the measure in which he proves, in deeds, his readiness to support materially the Divine institutions of His Faith."
Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 68

Contributing to the Baha'i fund constitutes an act of discipline which is an intrinsic element of the devotional life of the individual. No believer should be unaware of the privilege of contributing to the advancement of the Cause of God, irrespective of his material circumstances. The practice of giving to the Fund strengthens the connection between the believer and the Cause and enhances his sense of identification with it. Divine confirmations redound upon those who offer a portion of their material resources in a spirit of sacrifice, motivated by their love of the Faith and their desire to assist in its progress.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 17, 1992, to the Continental Board of Counselors

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Principles of the Fund-Obligation and Privilege")

Fund Appeals
Appeals of a general character, carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances....
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 101

The National Assembly should neither feel embarrassed nor ashamed in turning to the friends, continuously appealing to them to exemplify their faith and devotion to the Cause by sacrificing for it, and pointing out to them that they will grow spiritually through their acts of self-abnegation, that the fear of poverty should not deter them from sacrificing for the Fund, and that the assistance and bounty of the Source of all good and of all wealth are unfailing and assured.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated February 9, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[10.29] In matters of contribution we should not use any compulsion whatsoever and ascertain clearly the desire of the donor. We should appeal to but not coerce the friends.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 9, 1926,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 5

Use of Pledges
Pledges can be useful as a means of encouraging contributions and of bringing the financial needs of the Cause to the attention of the friends. This method can be particularly helpful in a situation where a Spiritual Assembly has a major task to perform, such as the building of a Haziratu'l-Quds or the establishment of a tutorial school, and needs to have some idea in advance of whether the funds for the project will be available. However, it would be entirely contrary to Baha'i principles to bring any pressure to bear when calling for pledges or when endeavoring to collect them. Once a pledge has been given it is permissible to remind the donor, privately, of his expressed intention to contribute and to inquire courteously if it would be possible for him to honor his pledge, but Assemblies must be aware that such pledges are not an obligation in any legal sense; their redemption is entirely a matter of conscience. Lists of those making pledges must not be publicized.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 30

Fund Raising
The House of Justice feels that it is important for the friends never to lose sight of the fact that contributing to the funds of the Faith is a spiritual responsibility and privilege of profound significance in the spiritual life of the individual believer, and care must be taken not to trivialize this aspect of Baha'i life by applying to it too many "gimmicks" or treating it with a lack of dignity. At the same time, the Assemblies should not dampen the enthusiasm of those friends who, having only slender financial resources, devise imaginative ways of earning money for the work of the Faith.

Within this framework, there is clearly a difference in the range of activities open to individuals and those which it would be befitting and dignified for a Spiritual Assembly to engage in or sponsor.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 26, 1982

Such gatherings for collections of funds are permissible if it is done with a true spirit of sacrifice, not when the audience is especially aroused to a frenzy and mob psychology is used to induce them to pay.

Shoghi Effendi has repeatedly stated that no pressure should [10.30] be used upon the friends and psychological pressure falls under that category. But there is much difference between such gatherings often used by religious bodies, and a true quiet, prayerful atmosphere when a person is, of his own accord, aroused to make some sacrifice. The distinction is very delicate, but it is for the Chairman to use his power to see that one desirable form is not

corrupted into the other. All the activities of the Cause should be carried through in a dignified manner.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 28, 1932,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 8

Solicitation by Individual Believers
When a Baha'i finds it essential to seek the help of others, and after his own efforts and those of his family and close friends have proved inadequate, he may certainly turn to his Local Spiritual Assembly, which will consult on his problem, extend a helping hand to him, if the conditions of the Local Fund permit, and even more importantly, will counsel and advise him on what opportunities are open to him, and what steps he might take to seek a solution to his problem. If the Local Assembly feels that the help or guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly should be sought, it will no doubt refer the matter to the National Spiritual Assembly.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 1, 1980, in Lights of Guidance, p. 123

Individual believers seeking funds for deputization for either pioneering or travel teaching, or for any other purpose, should first seek assistance from their own Local Spiritual Assembly or in the case of one who resides in a non-Assembly location, the nearest available Assembly. Should assistance be unavailable from this source, it is preferable that the believer make any subsequent requests to other Spiritual Assemblies through its own Local Spiritual Assembly. Seeking assistance from Spiritual Assemblies and/or individual believers through a general appeal is undesirable. Should this practice become widespread, it could result in attention being diverted from the more immediate and pressing needs of individual communities.

(See also in Chapter 7, Section entitled "Deputization")

Auctions
There is clearly no objection to an Assembly's giving contributions in kind to a professional auctioneer to sell and then to use the proceeds for the Fund. Whether it would be proper to hold such an "ordinary auction" among Baha'is would depend upon the Assembly's judgment as to whether a properly dignified atmosphere [10.31] could be observed and also whether it could be construed as bringing pressure to bear upon the friends to contribute which would, of course, be undesirable. In general the House of Justice prefers not to encourage such auctions for the Fund.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 26, 1982,
quoted in Baha'i Canada Supplement, January, 1988

Lotteries, Games of Chance, Raffles
In reviewing your Minutes for 15 March 1967, we note Item 258 in which the Treasurer suggests a lottery as a means of disposing of a Persian carpet which has been given to you by one of the believers. We do not feel this is an appropriate way in which to raise funds....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated November 20, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly

As to participation in Bingo games by a Local Spiritual Assembly with the intention of contributing to the Fund, we do not feel it is appropriate for funds for the Faith to be raised through games of chance or raffles.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 20, 1980

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Gambling")

Sale of Personal Items

As to the sale of personal items for the benefit of Baha'i funds, we begin with the principle that any believer may sell personal services or goods to anyone and do with the proceeds as he wishes, including giving any or all of them to Baha'i purposes. In doing so, however, he should not represent to non-Baha'is that such a sale is for the benefit of a Baha'i fund as it is also a principle that it is improper to solicit funds from non-Baha'is in the name of the Faith for any purpose. This includes the sale of food and admission to entertainment.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 15, 1984, in Lights of Guidance, p. 252

I feel that only such goods as are owned by believers, whether made by Baha'is or non-Baha'is, may be sold in the interests of the Temple or any other Baha'i institutions, thus maintaining the general principle that non-believers are not, whether directly or indirectly, expected to contribute to the support of institutions that are of a strictly Baha'i character. As to the manner of the disposal of Baha'i property [items owned by individual believers] for such purposes, and the channel through which the sale may be effected, I feel that no rigid rule should be imposed. Individual Baha'is are [10.32] free to seek the help of private individuals or of Spiritual Assemblies to act as intermediary for such transactions. We should avoid confusion on one hand and maintain efficiency on the other, and lay no unnecessary restrictions that would fetter individual initiative and enterprise.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated January 4, 1929, in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 15

Promotion of Personal Businesses or Services

Baha'is sometimes take advantage of Feasts, firesides, other Baha'i gatherings and Baha'i mailing lists to promote products which they sell or services in which they are engaged for personal profit. It is the policy of the National Spiritual Assembly at present not to permit such sales, even if the stated purpose is to give part of the proceeds to the Fund, as this may place undue pressure on the believers.

Raising Funds from and on Behalf of Non-Baha'i Organizations

It is improper for Baha'is to solicit funds from non-Baha'is in the name of the Faith for any purpose. The following passage from the Pen of Baha'u'llah:

It would be impossible to conceive any act more contemptible than soliciting, in the name of the one true God, the riches which men possess.

clearly indicates what the attitudes of the Baha'is should be.

There is, however, a wide range of fund-raising activities in which Baha'is may engage. For example, Baha'i institutions are free to approach governments or institutions which hold themselves out as wishing to fund charitable activities, to apply for grants to assist in specific humanitarian projects. A Baha'i School which has both Baha'i and non-Baha'i pupils is free to raise funds for its own development by such activities as concerts, etc., or by appeals to parents; in this instance, a humanitarian institution is clearly identified, and the funds are being collected in its name rather than in the name of the Faith. Another example is that of a Baha'i who wishes to sell an item he owns to the general public for a fair market price; he is free to use the proceeds for any purpose he wishes, including contributing them all, or in part, to the Baha'i Fund, provided he does not represent to the public that the sale is being conducted for the benefit of the Faith.

There would be no objection to the Baha'i community's joining with others to give a concert or undertake some other similar activity [10.33] to raise funds for a deserving charity. Such activities or even the making of donations to humanitarian work should be, and should be seen to be, acts of sincere assistance and cooperation. In choosing to engage in such fundraising, a Baha'i community would need to ensure that assisting the charity would not have partisan political implications or support purposes contrary to the interests of the Faith. It would need to watch carefully that its involvement in such activities does not divert its energies from the vital work of teaching the Faith and consolidating its Institutions.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 20, 1987,
in Baha'i Canada Supplement, dated January, 1988, p. 5

WAYS OF GIVING

To the Baha'i Funds
Cash and Gifts in Kind
Each national assembly must find ways and means to stimulate the offering of contributions, in cash or kind, to make it easy for the friends to contribute and to give proper receipts to the donors.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, p. 35

Gifts in kind may include a wide variety of non-cash items and are generally acceptable as contributions to the Funds. Local and National Assemblies prefer that donors sell the items or property themselves and contribute the proceeds to the Fund whenever possible. But in circumstances where the market available to the donor may be limited or other factors prevent the donor from selling the item, the Assembly may accept the contribution. The discretion to accept such gifts remains with the receiving Assembly.

In many parts of the world gifts of produce and handicrafts may be a large potential source of regular donations and could well be encouraged, proper arrangements being made for their collection and sale, and the disposition of the proceeds.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 30

Anonymous Contributions
The friends can give their contributions to the treasurer, or, if they wish to remain anonymous and give small sums, a receptacle can be provided. The local assembly can decide this matter.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated September 29, 1951,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 12

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to inform you that there is no objection in principle to receiving anonymous contributions to either the International or National Funds; they must merely be treated as contributions from non-Baha'is and earmarked for charitable purposes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 11, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[10.34] (See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Contributions from Non-Baha'is")

Reimbursement of Expenses
It is the duty and privilege of individual believers to serve the Cause of Baha'u'llah and they have no general right to be reimbursed by the Fund for expenditures that they incur in this way.

Obviously it is only courteous for an administrative body to offer to reimburse a believer for expenses incurred in a project that it asks him to undertake, and it may wish to offer financial assistance to friends who are spontaneously rendering services that it knows they cannot well afford. In offering such assistance or reimbursement the Assembly or Committee will undoubtedly wish to keep the expenditure within reasonable limits, but for this purpose each project should be assessed on its own merits and it is in general undesirable to lay down specific amounts for travel and accommodation as a guideline.

We understand that in certain cases a believer may prefer to claim his expenses from the Fund and then return the equivalent as a contribution or follow some other acceptable course in order to obtain the tax benefit that such a procedure might confer. This is of course quite permissible and you will know best how to handle such matters in accordance with the legal requirements....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 2, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Contributions in Honor and Memory of a Loved One or Special Occasion
The progress of man's spirit in the divine world, after the severance of its connection with the body of dust, is through the bounty and grace of the Lord alone, or through the intercession and the sincere prayers of other human souls, or through the charities and important good works which are performed in its name.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 240

Contributions in memory or honor of a friend or loved one are accepted for all

of the Funds. A memorial card is available to inform the family of the deceased when a gift has been made to the National Baha'i Fund in the decedent's memory. It will be sent at the request of the donor when the family's name and address are provided to the Office of the Treasurer. (Request forms are available from the Office of the Treasurer.) Such gifts can also be made without requesting a card.

A friend or loved one can be honored by sending a special gift to the Fund in his or her name. Birthdays, graduations, [10.35] marriages, Ayyam-i-Ha, wedding anniversaries, Baha'i declarations, pioneering moves, firesides given, hospitality, services rendered, Naw-Ruz and the 12 days of Ridvan are among the occasions on which such gifts might be offered.

Automatic Contribution System
The Office of the Treasurer has developed a convenient way for individuals, Baha'i Groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies to contribute to the National, Continental and International Baha'i Funds through direct electronic withdrawal from the donor's bank account. This program is called the Automatic Contribution System (ACS).

It benefits the donor by assuring regularity, reducing postage and handling costs, and saving time otherwise spent in writing out checks. It benefits the National Assembly and the Universal House of Justice by reducing processing costs and providing a steady flow of funds for the work of the Faith. The automatic withdrawals are made once every Gregorian month and are recorded on the donor's bank statement. An annual statement is sent to each donor for tax purposes.

To obtain an ACS subscription form or to make further inquiries, contact the Office of the Treasurer.

Planned Giving and Estate Bequests
Planned giving may include gifts given during the life of the donor or gifts that will take effect after the donor's death. Gifts that take effect after a donor's death are called "testamentary gifts" or "estate bequests." They are usually created through a trust or will.

Planned gifts may typically involve simple financial instruments or property (e.g., insurance policies, securities or notes) or more sophisticated instruments and techniques (e.g., trusts, life estates, annuities, etc.). These gifts are planned and structured to account for the donor's needs and wishes and to benefit the Faith. There are often tax considerations that should be carefully reviewed.

(See also Chapter 18, Section entitled "Wills")

Insurance and Securities
Contributions to the Baha'i Funds may also be made through insurance policies and in the form of securities (i.e., stocks and bonds).

Questions about any of these methods of contributing to the fund may be

directed to the Office of the Treasurer at the Baha'i National Center.

To Charity
In your letter of 11 September you say that the questions of how to help the Third World or the poor who are suffering under calamities are much discussed in your community and you wish to know whether to create a special fund for such needs, to ask for special contributions from time to time, or whether there are other ways in which you could help....

[10.36] In our concern for such immediate obvious calls upon our succor we must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning„a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the mission of Baha'u'llah to lift at last.

The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men.

It is not merely material well-being that people need.

What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives„they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to everyday behavior.

It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed.

There are mighty agencies in this world, governments, foundations, institutions of many kinds with tremendous financial resources which are working to improve the material lot of human beings.

Anything we Baha'is could add to such resources in the way of special funds or contributions would be a negligible drop in the ocean.

However, alone among men we have the divinely-given remedy for the real ills of mankind; no one else is doing or can do this most important work....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 19, 1974

Regarding the question you raised: In the first place every believer is free to follow the dictates of his own conscience as regards the manner in which he should spend his own money. Secondly, we must always bear in mind that there are so few Baha'is in the world, relative to the world's population, and so many people in need, that even if all of us gave all we had, it would not alleviate more than an infinitesimal amount of suffering. This does not mean we must not help the needy, we should; but our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting once and for all time the burden of hunger and misery from mankind, for it is only through the system of Baha'u'llah„Divine in origin„that the world can be gotten on its feet and want, fear, hunger, war, etc., be eliminated. Non-Baha'is cannot contribute to our work or do it for us; so really our first obligation is to support our own teaching work as this will

lead to the healing of the nations.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated December 8, 1947,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 12

SUGGESTED READINGS
[10.37]

Huququ'llah, Extracts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice

God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi

Ridvan letters from the Universal House of Justice, dated 1988 & 1989

Wellspring of Guidance, Messages from the Universal House of Justice dated, 1963-1968

Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, 1988 edition

Stewardship and Development: a Desktop Reference for Spiritual Assemblies and Treasurers, 1997

The Writing of a Will, an outline for teaching a course on wills preparation; from the Office of the Treasurer or Baha'i Distribution Service

APPENDIX A
HANDLING EARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS

[10.38] The beloved Guardian was very emphatic that contributions to Baha'i funds, given for specified purposes, may be used only for those purposes, unless the donor consents to a change. If the Assembly cannot use the contribution for the purpose specified, it may refuse to accept it. Alternatively it could consult the donor and suggest that he release the contribution for general purposes or transfer it to another specified one, but no pressure should be exerted to force his acquiescence. On the other hand, once money has been contributed to an Assembly, it is the property of that Assembly, even though earmarked for a specific purpose, and the donor has no right to change its purpose unilaterally. The Assembly, however, may, at its own discretion, accept his request to do so.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 30, 1984,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, p. 26

This question of the proper accounting for earmarked funds is ver y important. The account books of any Assembly should be designed in a way that will always clearly distinguish between earmarked funds and funds freely at the disposition of the Assembly, so that there will be no danger of the Assembly's inadvertently commingling them and spending earmarked funds for the wrong purpose.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 6, 1984,
in Baha'i Funds: Contributions and Administration, pp. 25-26

We have been asked to call your attention to the principle that earmarked funds such as those for the purchase or maintenance of properties, for special teaching projects, etc. should not be used for other purposes, but should be held in a special account until expended for the purpose for which they were given.

...If the project for which the funds have been given is abandoned, the contribution should be returned to the donor unless he agrees that it may be used for other purposes. Strict adherence to the principles regarding the earmarking of funds is extremely important for many reasons, including the maintaining of the confidence of the friends in matters pertaining to the Fund.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 21, 1979, Baha'i Funds and Contributions, p. 23

[10.39] But care must be taken not to violate for any reason the right of the individual believer to earmark his contribution. The need, therefore, is to make clear to individual believers and local Spiritual Assemblies how they should express their earmarkings so that the National Assembly can know whether a contribution is intended to be toward any particular segment of the national budget or to be a separate contribution merely passed through the National Assembly. In view of the Guardian's statement one should assume that, unless there is an indication to the contrary, an earmarked contribution is intended to be over and above the allocation made out of the National Fund.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 18, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Individual and Collective Contributions Are Distinct" and also discussion on use of funds earmarked for properties; Chapter 14, Section entitled "Handling Earmarked Contributions")

APPENDIX B
TAX ISSUES

TAX EXEMPT STATUS
The U.S. Treasury Department has held that the National Spiritual Assembly and all Local Spiritual Assemblies are exempt from federal income tax as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (hereinafter sometimes called "the Code") in a letter dated June 26, 1995. A copy of this letter is available upon request.

This exempt status enables donors to deduct contributions to the Spiritual Assemblies as provided by Section 170 of the Code. Likewise, bequests, legacies, devices, transfers or gifts to the Spiritual Assemblies are deductible for federal estate and gift tax purposes as provided by Sections 2055, 2106, and 2522 of the Code.

As substantiation of the National Spiritual Assembly and Local Spiritual Assemblies" group exempt status, an Assembly may refer to the above mentioned U.S. Treasury Department letter of June 26, 1995. In addition, the Internal Revenue Service publishes a list entitled Cumulative List, Organizations

Described in Section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. In this publication the Local Spiritual Assemblies are incorporated by reference within the item which reads "National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, Wilmette, IL. (1). The code number "(1)" denotes 10.40] that contributions to subordinate units, which would include all Local Spiritual Assemblies, are deductible.

In addition to the benefit conferred on donors enabling them to deduct contributions to Spiritual Assemblies, the U.S. government's tax ruling specifically grants to the Spiritual Assemblies exemption from filing Federal income tax returns. The ruling states that Spiritual Assemblies are not required to file the annual return of information, Form 990, generally required of organizations exempt under Section 501(c)(3).

UNRELATED BUSINESS INCOME TAX

Some Local Spiritual Assemblies may be subject to income tax on income from an activity not related to their exempt purpose. Such income must be derived from an activity which is considered a trade or business; is conducted on a regular basis; and is not substantially related to the Assembly's tax-exempt religious purpose.

The Code does provide for some relief from this tax by allowing a specific deduction for the first $1,000 of unrelated business taxable income. In addition the Code excludes from the definition of "unrelated" income the following: interest, dividends, royalties, annuities, gains on the sale of certain property and income from rents of real property, providing that such real property is not financed by debt (e.g., a mortgage).

Therefore, if an Assembly owns real estate (e.g., a local center) which is subject to a mortgage and is rented to others, either in whole or in part, it may be subject to unrelated business taxable income and required to file a tax return. The returns are made on Form 990T and unless the Assembly is taxable as a trust, it will be subject to the regular corporate tax rates.

Suffice it to say that if an Assembly believes it may be subject to the unrelated business income tax, it should contact a tax professional for further guidance on this matter and then take the necessary steps to properly comply with the applicable tax code provisions.

FEDERAL TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

The Internal Revenue Service issues employer identification numbers to organizations. In accordance with Internal Revenue Procedure, each Local Spiritual Assembly should also have its own employer identification number. To obtain a number, contact the Office of the Treasurer. The Treasurer's Office will provide you with the proper forms and instructions to apply to the Internal Revenue Service to obtain an employer identification number. Local Spiritual Assemblies therefore should not use the National Spiritual Assembly's identification number. If an Assembly finds that it is using the number 36-2170876, the number previously issued to the National Spiritual Assembly, it

should contact the Treasurer's Office for instructions to obtain its own number.

[10.41] Receipting Contributions
A number of changes in the tax laws affecting tax-exempt charitable organizations were signed in to law in August 1993. These laws apply to Spiritual Assemblies and Baha'i Groups. As of January 1994:

1. No deduction is allowed from individual income taxes for any charitable contributions of $250 or more unless the donor receives 'contemporaneous written substantiation" from the charity (in this case, the Local Spiritual Assembly).

Note: "substantiation" means a receipt or acknowledgment for the contribution.

'Contemporaneous" means that the donor must receive the receipt before filing his or her tax return.

2. In cases where the charity has provided goods or services to the donor in exchange for the contribution (e.g., a dinner at a fund raising event), this written acknowledgment must include a good faith estimate by the Assembly of the value of such goods or services. The donor is only allowed a tax deduction for the amount of his/her donation over and above the cost of the goods or services received in return.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Quid Pro Quo Contributions")

3. The donor may no longer rely solely on a canceled check to substantiate a cash contribution of $250 or more.

The IRS does not prescribe a specific format for the written acknowledgments or receipts. For example, letters, postcards, or computer-generated forms may be acceptable. The acknowledgments do not have to include the donor's social security or tax identification number. They must, however, provide sufficient information to substantiate the amount of the contribution. If the donation is not in the form of cash or check (for example, real estate, securities or jewelry), the acknowledgment should describe the item but does not need to include its estimated value. Valuation of the donated time through obtaining estimates, showing the purchase price, etc., is the responsibility of the donor.

4. The written substantiation (receipt) should also note whether the Spiritual Assembly provided any goods or services in consideration for the contribution, and if so, must provide a description and good-faith estimate of the value of the goods or services. Such contributions are referred to as "quid pro quo contributions" in the new law.

5. [10.42] If the goods or services consist entirely of intangible religious

benefits, the receipt should indicate this, but the statement need not describe or provide a value of these benefits. An example of an intangible religious benefit would be admission to a Baha'i event. In addition, the value and description of de minimis (insignificant) tangible religious benefits, such as refreshments received at a Baha'i Feast, need not be mentioned in the receipt. If, on the other hand, the donor received nothing in return for the contribution, the receipt must so state.

The Spiritual Assembly may either provide separate acknowledgment letters and/or receipts for each contribution of $250 or more from a donor, or furnish periodic statements substantiating such contributions as a lump sum. (See examples of receipts following this section.)

Quid Pro Quo Contributions
As of January 1, 1994, a charitable organization must provide a written disclosure statement to donors who make a contribution, described as a "quid pro quo contribution," in excess of $75. The disclosure statement is separate from the donor substantiation (receipt) as discussed in the previous Section entitled "Receipting Contributions," and is in addition to it.

A "quid pro quo contribution" is a contribution made partly as a contribution and partly as payment for goods or services provided to the donor by the charity. An example of a "quid pro quo contribution" is where the donor gives a charity $100 for a concert ticket valued at $40. In this example, only $60 would be deductible by the individual donor. Because the donor's payment (quid pro quo contribution) exceeds $75, the disclosure statement must be furnished to the donor by the Assembly, even though the deductible amount itself does not exceed $75.

The required written disclosure statement may be included on the receipt or provided in a separate document at the same time. Either way, the statement should:

´ Inform the donor that the amount of the contribution that is deductible for federal income tax purposes is limited to the excess of any money (and the value of any property other than money) contributed by the donor over the value of goods or services provided by the charity, and

´ Provide the donor with a good-faith estimate of the value of the goods or services that the donor received. (See examples of receipts following this section.)

A penalty is imposed on organizations that do not meet the disclosure requirements. For failure to make the required disclosure in [10.43] connection with a quid pro quo contribution of more than $75, there is a penalty of $10 per contribution, not to exceed $5,000 per fund-raising event or mailing.

These regulations require additional effort on the part of the Assembly; however, the friends could be adversely affected by not being allowed deductions for their contributions to the Funds of $250 or more if they do not receive these materials from the Assembly in a timely manner.

EXAMPLE #1: "QUID PRO QUO CONTRIBUTION"

Receipt

We are delighted to acknowledge your contribution of $100.00 to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Heretown. The admission price to the concert held in connection with the event was $40.

With loving regards,

Local Spiritual Assembly of Heretown

EXAMPLE #2: "PERIODIC STATEMENT"

Receipt

We are delighted to acknowledge your contribution of $1,000 for the months of January, February and March of 1994 to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Heretown. The Assembly also acknowledges that you purchased two tickets for two fundraising events totaling $100. The "admission cost" of the concerts that formed a part of the fund-raiser was $40 each, or $80. You will want to subtract the $80 total from any charitable deduction you might claim against your taxes for the current year.

With loving regards,

Local Spiritual Assembly of Heretown

APPENDIX C
BUILDING THE ARC

[10.44] As construction work commences on the first of the monumental Edifices which must be raised on Mount Carmel to complete the World Administrative Center of the Baha'i Faith, it seems appropriate to review the significance of this vast project and to reflect on its basic purpose.

The projects under way on this mountain are of profound significance. They represent much more than the erection of buildings to meet the expanding needs of the Baha'i World Center. The call for contributions to the Arc Projects Fund, far from being a diversion of resources which might otherwise be used to help relieve the distress of mankind, offers the followers of Baha'u'llah a providential opportunity to participate in an endeavor which is central to the work of the Faith in eradicating the causes of the appalling suffering now afflicting humanity.

The Baha'i community encourages and supports the manifold efforts being made by people of goodwill to better the condition of humankind and promote unity and harmony among the peoples and nations of the earth. However, the believers should never, for even one moment, lose sight of the fact that the crisis now engulfing every part of the planet is essentially spiritual. "That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world," Baha'u'llah emphatically states, "is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith." Our acute awareness

of the magnitude of the misery which so many groups and individuals are experiencing should spur us on to ever-greater exertions, inspired and animated by an abiding consciousness that only through the World Order of Baha'u'llah can the multitudinous problems burdening humanity be resolved.

From the dawn of Baha'i history, attention has been directed to the glory of the World Order which the Revelation of Baha'u'llah is destined to unfold. The Bab Himself declared, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Baha'u'llah and rendereth thanks unto his Lord" while Baha'u'llah affirmed, in the Mother Book of His Dispensation, that "the world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order." It is abundantly evident that the exalted aims of the Faith can be accomplished only through the instrumentality of the World [10.45] Order which Baha'u'llah has established for that purpose. The spiritual transformation of humanity, the relief of the diverse peoples of the earth from rampant suffering, the attainment and preservation of true peace in the world, the birth of a world civilization,„all such noble objectives of the Cause of God will remain unrealized unless they are associated with that radical change in the structure and functioning of human society inherent in the growth and fruition of His divinely ordained Order. The institutions of the Baha'i Administrative Order, now being raised in all parts of the world through the endeavors of the believers, are the precursor, the nucleus and the pattern of that World Order which will, in the course of time, exert its full benevolent influence on all the peoples of the earth.

Shoghi Effendi explained that the revelation by Baha'u'llah of the Kitab-i-Aqdas "preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest." And he referred to "the triple impulse generated through the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel by Baha'u'llah and the Will and Testament as well as the Tablets of the Divine Plan bequeathed by the Center of His Covenant,„the three Charters which have set in motion three distinct processes, the first operating in the Holy Land for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Center and the other two, throughout the rest of the Baha'i world, for its propagation and the establishment of its Administrative Order." These three processes, although distinct, are closely interrelated. Developments at the World Center of the Faith, the heart and nervecenter of the Administrative Order, must necessarily exert a pronounced influence on the organic body of the worldwide Baha'i community, and be affected by its vitality. The Administrative Order may best be viewed as the chief instrument for the prosecution of the Divine Plan, while that Plan has become recognized as the most potent agency for the development of the administrative structure of the Faith. It follows that, for the sound and balanced growth of the Faith and the speedy attainment of world order, due attention must be paid to all three processes.

The construction work now in progress on Mount Carmel should be seen as a major historic thrust in the development of the first of these three mighty processes,„a process which was launched more than one hundred years ago by

Baha'u'llah Himself when He pitched His tent on this Holy Mountain and revealed the Tablet described by the Guardian as "the Charter of the World Spiritual and Administrative Centers of the Faith." The unfoldment of this process has [10.46] been distinguished by the interment of the sacred remains of the Bab in the bosom of this mountain within a sanctuary built by 'Abdu'lBaha, followed subsequently by the erection of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Bab by Shoghi Effendi. When, in 1939, the Guardian transferred the bodily remains of the brother and mother of the Master to their final resting-place in the immediate vicinity of that of the Greatest Holy Leaf, he described his action as one which "incalculably reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot which, under the wings of the Bab's overshadowing Sepulcher," is designated to be the "focal center of these worldshaking, world-embracing, world-directing administrative institutions" which the followers of Baha'u'llah are raising for the salvation of humanity and the fulfillment of its glorious destiny.

Shortly before his passing, the Guardian completed the structure of the International Baha'i Archives, "the first stately Edifice destined to usher in the establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on Mount Carmel„the Ark referred to by Baha'u'llah in the closing passages of His Tablet of Carmel."

In more recent years the contributions of the believers around the world permitted construction of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the second of the Edifices which Shoghi Effendi had envisaged as being located on a far-flung arc, surrounding the resting-places of the members of the Holy Family. This achievement opened the way for the announcement in 1987 of the project for erection of the remaining buildings of the World Administrative Center of the Faith and for the construction of the eighteen monumental Terraces contemplated by 'Abdu'l-Baha, below and above the Shrine of the Bab. It signaled a major step toward the consummation of the vision expressed by the Guardian as "the splendor of the institutions which that triumphant Faith must erect on the slopes of a mountain, destined to be so linked with the city of "Akka that a single grand metropolis will be formed to enshrine the spiritual as well as the administrative seats of the future Baha'i Commonwealth."

The Edifices and Terraces now under construction are a manifest expression of the emergence from obscurity of the Faith of Baha'u'llah and of the determining role it is ordained to play in the affairs of humankind. When the buildings are completed, they will stand as the visible seat of mighty institutions whose purpose is no other than the spiritualization of humanity and the preservation of justice and unity throughout the world. The future significance of the Terraces is evident from their characterization by Shoghi Effendi as [10.47] "the Pathway of the Kings and Rulers of the World." The beauty and magnificence of the Gardens and Terraces now under development are symbolic of the nature of the transformation which is destined to occur both within the hearts of the world's peoples and in the physical environment of the planet.

The establishment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on Mount

Carmel at this juncture in the fortunes of mankind is essential to hasten the accomplishment of God's purpose for humanity through the operation of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. The believers are called upon to sustain this vast collective enterprise upon which the community of the Most Great Name is now embarked, through a sacrificial outpouring of material resources and through their dedication to the work of the Cause at this time of unprecedented need and opportunity.

Mount Carmel was extolled by the prophet Isaiah almost three thousand years ago, when he announced that "it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." Now, with the coming of the Lord of Hosts, His devoted servants throughout the world have been summoned to the momentous undertaking with which the fulfillment of this ancient promise is associated. As they dedicate themselves to this mighty task, let them draw inspiration from these Words of Baha'u'llah: "Carmel, in the Book of God, hath been designated as the Hill of God, and His Vineyard. It is here that, by the grace of the Lord of Revelation, the Tabernacle of Glory hath been raised. Happy are they that attain thereunto; happy they that set their faces towards it."
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 4, 1994, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

11„BAHA'I EDUCATION

THE NATURE OF EDUCATION

Definition of Education

[11.1] Education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man.

Human education signifies civilization and progress„that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: It consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness." This is the goal of the world of humanity.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 8

Purpose of Education For the Individual

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.

Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 156-57

For Society

We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge....
Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 129

[11.2] Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 259-60

We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is the education of the child.
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 4

Among other teachings and principles Baha'u'llah counsels the education of all members of society. No individual should be denied or deprived of intellectual training, although each should receive according to capacity. None must be left in the grades of ignorance, for ignorance is a defect in the human world.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 108

He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife.... There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 175

Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words.... In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto [11.3] him. Happy the man that cleaveth unto it, and woe betide the heedless.
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 6-7

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of

the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 126

DUTIES OF THE ASSEMBLY

Incumbent to Educate the Children

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Baha'i conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 126

They [Local Spiritual Assemblies] must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Baha'i educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 38

To assist the children of the poor in the attainment of these accomplishments, and particularly in learning the basic subjects, is incumbent upon the members of the Spiritual Assemblies, and is accounted as one of the obligations laid upon the conscience of the trustees of God in every land.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 58

Provide Well-Planned Programs

A basic and vital requirement of these days is the matter of educating the boys and girls. One of the duties devolving upon the members of Spiritual Assemblies is that, with the support of the friends, they should exert all their powers to establish schools for the instruction of boys and girls in the things of the spirit, the fundamentals of teaching the Faith, reading the Sacred Writings, learning the history of the Faith, the secular branches of knowledge, the various arts and skills, and the different languages„so [11.4] that Baha'i methods of instruction will become so widely known that children from every level of society will seek to acquire divine teaching as well as secular knowledge in Baha'i schools, and thereby means for the promotion of the Cause of God will be provided.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 56

Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 58

The education of children in the teachings of the Faith must be regarded as an essential obligation of every Baha'i parent, every local and national community and it must become a firmly-established Baha'i activity during the course of

this Plan. It should include moral instruction by work and example and active participation by children in Baha'i community life.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
letter dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to the Baha'is of the World

Same Curricula for Boys and Girls
A very important element in the attainment of such equality is Baha'u'llah's provision that boys and girls must follow essentially the same curriculum in schools.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 28, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Training and Culture of Daughters More Necessary than Sons
Abdu'l-Baha, in His Tablets, not only calls attention to the responsibility of parents to educate all their children, but He also clearly specifies that the "training and culture of daughters is more necessary than that of sons," for girls will one day be mothers, and mothers are the first educators of the new generation. If it is not possible, therefore, for a family to educate all the children, preference is to be accorded to daughters since, through educated mothers, the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society.
Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas: Notes, no. 76, p 199-200

Duties of Individuals and Community
Fathers
Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet.
Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p 37

[11.5] God hath prescribed unto every father to educate his children, both boys and girls, in the sciences and in morals, and in crafts and professions....
Baha'u'llah: The Arts, p 1-2

Mothers
For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mother who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgment, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.
'Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p 126

Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behavior that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Baha'i education.
'Abdu'l-Baha: Selections form the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p 124-125

Children

Show honor to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great.
Baha'u'llah, in Family Life, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal Houe of Justice, pp. 386-387

Every child without exception must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning, beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech and contemporary technology.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Administration: a Compilation, p.58

You Baha'i children and young people have both privileges and great obligations ahead of you, for your generation will be the ones to help build up a new, better and more beautiful world after the dark years of this war are passed. You should prepare yourselves for this great task by trying to grasp the true meaning of the teachings and not just merely accepting them as something you are taught. They are like a wonderful new world of thought just beginning to be explored, and when we realize that Baha'u'llah has brought teachings and laws for a thousand years to come, we can [11.6] readily see that each new generation may find some greater meaning in the writings than the ones gone before did.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in the Compilations, vol 1, no 493

ORGANIZATION AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

Teaching Qualifications

Blessed is that teacher who remaineth faithful to the Covenant of God, and occupieth himself with the education of children. For him hath the Supreme Pen inscribed that reward which is revealed in the Most Holy Book. Blessed, blessed is he!
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 9

It is the hope of 'Abdu'l-Baha that those youthful souls in the school room of the deeper knowledge will be tended by one who traineth them to love. May they all, through the reaches of the spirit, learn well of the hidden mysteries; so well that in the Kingdom of the All-Glorious, each one of them, even as a nightingale endowed with speech, will cry out the secrets of the Heavenly Realm, and like unto a longing lover pour forth his sore need and utter want of the Beloved.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 32

Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization. Establish schools that are well-organized, and promote the fundamentals of instruction in the various branches of knowledge through teachers who are pure and sanctified, distinguished for their high standards of conduct and general excellence, and strong in faith; educators with a thorough knowledge of sciences and arts.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 33

Blessed art thou, since thou art engaged in rendering a service which will make thy face to shine in the Abha Kingdom, and that is the education and training of children. If one should, in the right way, teach and train the children, he will be performing a service than which none is greater at the Sacred Threshold.... You must, however, struggle unceasingly to perfect yourself and win ever higher achievements.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 31-32

Organization and Methods
Training of the friends and their striving, though serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human [11.7] resources necessary to the progress of the Cause. But the knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, and prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its interests.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1993, to the Baha'is of the World

The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Baha'i obligations and Baha'i conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that "Baha'i" is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word "Baha'i," if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.

Strive then to the best of thine ability to let these children know that a Baha'i is one who embodieth all the perfections, that he must shine out like a lighted taper,„not be darkness upon darkness and yet bear the name "Baha'i." Name thou this school the Baha'i Sunday School.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 26-27

O thou spiritual teacher! In thy school, instruct thou God's children in the customs of the Kingdom. Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness. Tend the young trees of the Abha Paradise with the welling waters of His grace and peace and joy.

...All these gifts and bounties depend upon love for the Beauty of the All-Glorious, and on the blessings in the teachings of the Most High, and the spiritual instructions of the Supreme Concourse, and on ecstasy and ardor and diligent pursuit of whatsoever will redound to the eternal honor of the community of man.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 32-33

To be specific, at the start the teacher must place a pen in the child's hand,

arrange the children in groups, and instruct each group according to its capacity....

[11.8] ...But the indispensable basis of all is that he should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 40-42

In explaining the fear of God to children, there is no objection to teaching it as 'Abdu'l-Baha so often taught everything, in the form of parables. Also the child should be made to understand that we don't fear God because He is cruel, but we fear Him because He is just, and, if we do wrong and deserve to be punished, then in His justice He may see fit to punish us. We must both love God and fear Him.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 72

Give them [the children] the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: Compilation, p. 30

Instruction in the schools must begin with instruction in religion. Following religious training, and the binding of the child's heart to the love of God, proceed with his education in the other branches of knowledge.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 35

(See Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 40 for an explanation of how to teach language arts and foreign languages to young children.)

What to Teach
The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old, be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshaling the divine proofs and evidences.

...Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves [11.9] and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 12-13

To Children
That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the Laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds....

Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat, recorded in the Books of God, may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments: But this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 6

Teach unto your children the words that have been sent down from God, that they may recite them in the sweetest of tones. This standeth revealed in a mighty Book.
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 8

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved,„even though he be ignorant,„is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.

Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way you train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and passions in the way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honor and acquiring all the excellences of humankind.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i Education: A Compilation, pp. 43-44

[11.10] In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.

...Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October, 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, pp. 27, 29

O ye recipients of the favors of God! In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 134

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Organization and Methods of

Instruction")

To Youth

Baha'u'llah considered education one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization,,this education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects. This should be the program of the Baha'i youth all over the world.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 60

The Baha'i youth must be taught how to teach the Cause of God. Their knowledge of the fundamentals of the Faith must be deepened and the standard of their education in science and literature enhanced. They must become thoroughly familiar with the language used and the example set by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His public addresses throughout the West. They must also be acquainted with those essential prerequisites of teaching as recorded in the Holy Books and Tablets.

Shoghi Effendi, in Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, p. 21

[11.11] I would strongly urge you to utilize, to the utmost possible extent, the wealth of authentic material gathered in Nabil's stirring narrative and to encourage the youth to master and digest the facts recorded therein as a basis for their future work in the teaching field, and as a sustenance to their spiritual life and activities in the service of the Cause.

Shoghi Effendi, in Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, p. 22

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Summer and Winter Schools"; Chapter 7, Section entitled "Baha'i Youth Service Corps")

To Adults

To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Baha'u'llah's stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents. An exact and thorough comprehension of so vast a system, so sublime a revelation, so sacred a trust, is for obvious reasons beyond the reach and ken of our finite minds. We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.

Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 100

Dearly-loved friends, this is the theme we must pursue in our efforts to deepen in the Cause. What is Baha'u'llah's purpose for the human race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by "a new race of men'? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Baha and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean, let them organize regular study

classes for its constant consideration, and, as reinforcement to their effort, let them remember conscientiously the requirements of daily prayer and reading of the Word of God enjoined upon all Baha'is by Baha'u'llah.
The Universal House of Justice, in Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 114-15

The deepening and enrichment of the spiritual life of the individual believer, his increasing comprehension of the essential verities underlying his Faith, his training in its administrative [11.12] processes, his understanding of the fundamentals of the Covenants established by its Author and the authorized Interpreter of its teachings should be made the supreme objectives of the national representatives responsible for the edification, the progress and consolidation of these communities.
Shoghi Effendi, in Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, p. 25

Definite courses should be given along the different phases of the...Faith and in a manner that will stimulate the students to proceed in their studies privately once they return home, for the period of a few days is not sufficient to learn everything. They have to be taught the habit of studying the Cause constantly, for the more we read the Words the more will the truth they contain be revealed to us.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, p. 8

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Summer and Winter Schools")

Age to Begin Formal Children's Classes
As to the children: From the age of five their formal education must begin. That is, during the daytime they should be looked after in a place where there are teachers, and should learn good conduct.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 39

And when the child hath reached the age where he can make distinctions, let him be placed in a Baha'i school, in which at the beginning the Holy Texts are recited and religious concepts are taught. At this school the child is to study reading and writing as well as some fundamentals of the various branches of knowledge, such as can be learned by children.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 40

Using the Creative Word
The Guardian feels that it would be better for either the mothers of Baha'i children„or some Committee your Assembly might delegate the task to„to choose excerpts from the Sacred Words to be used by the child rather than just something made up. Of course prayer can be purely spontaneous, but many of the sentences and thoughts combined in Baha'i writings of a devotional nature are easy to grasp, and the revealed Word is endowed with a power of its own.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 68

[11.13] The Sciences and Arts
In accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all

his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 144

Drama
Shoghi Effendi was very much interested to learn of the success of the "Pageant of Nations" which you produced. He sincerely hopes that all those who attended it were inspired by the same spirit that animated you while arranging it. It is through such presentations that we can arouse the interest of the greatest number of people in the spirit of the Cause. That day will the Cause spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings are presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.
Shoghi Effendi, October 10, 1932, in Baha'i News, dated May, 1933, vol. 73, p. 7

Music
Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty, so that thou mayest chant verses at gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody.... By virtue of this, consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs, and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mysteries to be filled with joy and ecstasy.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Writings on Music, p. 4

The art of music must be brought to the highest stage of development, for this is one of the most wonderful arts and in this glorious age of the Lord of Unity it is highly essential to gain its mastery.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Writings on Music, pp. 5-6

Music is an important means to the education and development of humanity, but the only true way is through the Teachings of God. Music is like this glass, which is preferably pure and polished. It is precisely like this pure chalice before us, and the Teachings of God, the utterances of God, are like the water. When [11.14] the glass or chalice is absolutely pure and clear, and the water is perfectly fresh and limpid, then it will confer Life....
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Baha'i Writings on Music, p. 8

Baha'i Education Programs
A National Educational Program, Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education
See Appendix A

Institutes
See Appendix B

Educational Sites
See Appendix C

The Girl Scout and Boy Scout Religious Emblem

See Appendix D

BAHA'I SCHOLARSHIP

The man of consummate learning and the sage endowed with penetrating wisdom are the two eyes to the body of mankind.
Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 171

Nature of Baha'i Scholarship
Scholarship has a high station in the Baha'i teachings, and Baha'i scholars have a great responsibility to a growing, divinely-guided world society. The ascertainment of truth and the acquisition of a fuller understanding of the subjects of their scholarship are worthy and high endeavors.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, in The Baha'i World, Vol. 17, p. 196

The Cause needs more Baha'i scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, p. 44

Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them have a remedy.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 12, 1944, in Baha'i Youth, p. 5

The House of Justice understands that you desire to find ways of conveying spiritual truths in logical ways and demonstrating their validity through scientific proofs. There can be no objection to such an attitude. 'Abdu'l-Baha Himself used such a method. The danger [11.15] Baha'i scholars must avoid is the distortion of religious truth, almost forcibly at times, to make it conform to understandings and perceptions current in the scientific world. True Baha'i scholars should guard against this.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 7, 1983, to an individual believer

In the application of the social laws of the Faith, most of the difficulties can be seen to arise not only from outright disobedience, but also from the actions of those who, while careful to observe the letter of the law, try to go as far as it will permit them away from the spirit which lies at its heart. A similar tendency can be noted among some Baha'i scholars. The great advances in knowledge and understanding in the vital field of Baha'i scholarship will be made by those who, while well versed in their subjects and adhering to the principles of research, are also thoroughly imbued with love for the Faith and the determination to grow in the comprehension of its teachings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 27, 1983, to an individual believer

The House of Justice feels that Baha'i scholars must beware of the temptations

of intellectual pride. 'Abdu'l-Baha has warned the friends in the West that they would be subjected to intellectual tests, and the Guardian reminded them of this warning. There are many aspects of western thinking which have been exalted to a status of unassailable principle in the general mind, that time may well show to have been erroneous or, at least, only partially true. Any Baha'i who rises to eminence in academic circles will be exposed to the powerful influence of such thinking.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 27, 1983, to an individual believer

Role in Baha'i Community Development
The Universal House of Justice regards Baha'i scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Baha'i community as it emerges from obscurity.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 3, 1979, to participants of a Baha'i Studies Seminar

As more and more Baha'is enter the world of higher learning they will have opportunities of exerting great influence in bringing about in human consciousness and outlook that harmony of religion and science which is so great a principle of their Faith. The distinction desired by 'Abdu'l-Baha for all Baha'is is certainly for [11.16] attainment by Baha'i scholars, who by following the exhortations of Baha'u'llah to moderation, kindliness, tact and wisdom, may restore scholarship to that high station of dignity and admiration which it formerly held and which is confirmed by the utterances of Baha'u'llah.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
The Baha'i World, Vol. 17, p. 196

Role of the Assembly Concerning Baha'i Scholarship
The combination of absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God and His Teachings, with the searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith which those Teachings themselves enjoin, is a particular strength of this Dispensation. In past Dispensations the believers have tended to divide into two mutually antagonistic groups: those who held blindly to the letter of the Revelation, and those who questioned and doubted everything. Like all extremes, both of these can lead into error. The beloved Guardian has written that "The Baha'i Faith...enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth...." Baha'is are called upon to follow the Faith with intelligence and understanding. Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 7, 1980, to an individual believer

The House of Justice agrees that it is most important for the believers, and especially those who hold positions of responsibility in the Administrative Order, to react calmly and with tolerant and inquiring minds to views which differ from their own, remembering that all Baha'is are but students of the

Faith, ever striving to understand the Teachings more clearly and to apply them more faithfully, and none can claim to have perfect understanding of this Revelation. At the same time all believers, and scholars in particular, should remember the many warnings in the Writings against the fomenting of discord among the friends. It is the duty of the institutions of the Faith to guard the community against such dangers.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 18, 1979, to an individual believer

(See also Chapter 5, Section entitled "Reviewing Baha'i Literature and Materials")

[11.17] Distinction Between Individual and Authoritative Interpretation
A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings.

While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed.

In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own.

Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings.

As Shoghi Effendi wrote: "To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Baha'u'llah and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form.

There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for.

They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own.

As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall into this error and injure the Movement we so much adore.

There is no limit to the study of the Cause.

The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous."

So, although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading.

The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Baha'is.

The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being. Time

and again it has faced crises which have perplexed the believers, but each time the Cause, impelled by the immutable purpose of God, overcame the crisis and went on to greater heights.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 88-89

(See also Chapter 7, Section entitled "Baha'i Scholarship and Teaching")

BAHA'I SCHOOLS

Primary and Secondary Schools

The grave problems faced by Baha'i parents and children, when the children must attend schools that are strongly influenced by the degradation of present-day society, are fully appreciated.

However, the only ways to completely overcome these dangers would seem to be either to effect a reform of the entire non-Baha'i educational [11.18] system or to provide a world-wide network of Baha'i schools.

Both ways are very longterm projects beyond the capacity of the Baha'i community at this time.

Already, of course, Baha'i communities are establishing primary or tutorial schools in many parts of the world, but these are small and few in number and are located where there are such conditions as general illiteracy among the believers or where no other schools are available to them.

Undoubtedly, in time, this process will gain momentum and Baha'i schools of ever higher quality and scope will be established in country after country, as has already occurred in India, but, necessarily, this must now be a gradual process related, among other things, to the resources of the community, the number of Baha'i children needing education, and the availability of other suitable schools.

Perhaps in certain parts of the United States there are sufficiently large concentrations of Baha'i children to make the running of a private Baha'i school feasible„such a proposal has, indeed, been made by a number of individual believers in Alaska, principally teachers, but we stressed in that instance that, if implemented, it should be conducted as a private venture and that the people concerned should give very careful consideration to all the factors involved before initiating it; furthermore we pointed out to them their opportunities for improving the schools in which they themselves worked.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 2, 1976, to a National Spiritual Assembly

With the same effort that is spent to build and maintain one Baha'i school, hundreds of teachers belonging to official systems can be trained how to include in their daily activities several educational elements inspired by the Faith. In two areas„namely, moral education and the preparation of youth and junior youth for future life„the opportunities for Baha'i influence are almost unlimited.
Letter from Baha'i Social and Economic Development: Prospects for the Future,

written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated September 28, 1993

Baha'i Curriculum

There is as yet no such thing as a Baha'i curriculum, and there are no Baha'i publications exclusively devoted to this subject, since the Teachings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha do not present a definite and detailed educational system, but simply offer certain basic principles and set forth a number of teaching ideals that should guide future Baha'i educationalists in their efforts to formulate [11.19] an adequate teaching curriculum which would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Baha'i Teachings, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age.

These basic principles are available in the Sacred Writings of the Cause, and should be carefully studied, and gradually incorporated in various college and university programs. But the task of formulating a system of education which would be officially recognized by the Cause, and enforced as such throughout the Baha'i world is one which present-day generation of believers cannot obviously undertake, and which has to be gradually accomplished by Baha'i scholars and educationalists of the future.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, pp. 10-11

Summer and Winter Schools

Importance and Purpose

He was very happy to hear of the success of the school, especially that it has been the means of bringing to light hitherto unsuspected capacities among the friends.... The Summer School has been carrying on the divine work of bringing forth jewels from the mine of humanity and it is the hope of Shoghi Effendi and the friends here that those who have been trained in the Summer School will carry on the work in the various localities from which they have come....

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, p. 1

Shoghi Effendi feels that the real purpose of these Summer Schools is to deepen the knowledge of the friends. Lectures are very essential for they give a wonderful picture of the subject matter. But it is not sufficient to have a picture; the friends should deepen their knowledge and this can be achieved if, together with the lectures, there are study classes and seminar work carried on by the same lecturer. The world is undoubtedly facing a great crisis and the social, economic and political conditions are becoming daily more complex. Should the friends desire to take the lead in informing the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the minds of men. It is in these Summer Schools that this training should be provided for the friends.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, pp. 1-2

He has noted with deepest satisfaction indeed that your meetings have been well attended this year, and that the program had been made as varied and interesting as possible, and combined, as every Baha'i Summer School should, the threefold features [11.20] of devotion, study and recreation. Only through such a harmonious combination of these three elements can the institution of

the Summer School yield the maximum of beneficent results, and fulfill its true function of deepening the knowledge, stimulating the zeal, and fostering the spirit of fellowship among the believers in every Baha'i community.

The Guardian cherishes the hope that at the termination of your school this summer every one of the attendants will have de-rived such mental and spiritual benefits, and acquired such a fresh enthusiasm to serve as will enable him, upon his return to his local community, to labor with a determination and vigor that will excite the envy and admiration of his fellow-believers, and stimulate them to greater heights of consecration to the service of our beloved Cause.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, p. 3

Faithful attendance at any of these institutions of Baha'i learning would be indeed the best preparation for all prospective Baha'i teachers, and should as such be welcomed most heartily by all the believers.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, p. 4

Any Suitable Location
As regards the question you asked about a Summer School, there is no reason why a property should either be rented or bought for this purpose. You can arrange to hold a Summer School in any suitable place where the friends can find accommodation, and a hall can be rented for its sessions.... The primary purpose of the School is to deepen the knowledge of the friends in the Teachings, to enable them to consort, as Baha'is, with each other, and to confirm any contacts who may have attended. The School may be held during the winter season or any other time of the year.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Centers of Baha'i Learning, p. 7

(See also Chapter 7, Section entitled "Summer Schools'; Chapter 8, Section entitled "Bedrock of Baha'i National Growth and Devel- opment")

SUGGESTED READINGS

[11.21] Education
Foundations for a Spiritual Education, prepared by the National Baha'i Education Task Force

Scholarship, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, #17, #29, #37

Summary of the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education (available through the National Teacher Training Center at the Louhelen Baha'i School)

Baha'i Schools
Centers of Baha'i Learning, compiled by the Universal House of Justice, 1980

Baha'i Scholarship
The Baha'i World, vol. 17, "The Challenge and Promise of Baha'i Scholarship," pp. 195-96

APPENDIX A

[11.22] Is it not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent.
Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 25

The Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education is a program designed, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly, to provide a systematic basis for Baha'i education within the United States. Communities, Local Spiritual Assemblies, training institutes, teachers, and parents across the country use it to study and apply the Baha'i Writings to daily life, assisting in "transformation in the whole character of mankind" through touching the hearts and minds of the next generation and providing the means for their continual development.

The Core Curriculum program fulfills a mandate of the National Spiritual Assembly for the education and training of children ages 6-12. However, the learning processes utilized in the Core Curriculum is applicable to people of any age. 'Abdu'l-Baha's concrete suggestions of instructional methods and learning tools contribute to any learning environment or situation.

Core Curriculum processes train teachers of children's classes, parent facilitators to work with parents, race unity trainers to assist parents, teachers, and communities to raise up a generation free from prejudice and truly united, and marriage and family life trainers who offer workshops for married couples and for individuals who may marry in the future. Grounded in and guided by the Baha'i Writings, developed through a consultative process, and reliant on the active participation of Baha'i individuals and communities, the Core Curriculum provides a framework for training and facilitating the development of skills and capacities. Some essential points of the curriculum include:

´ The learning process is relevant to all ages and can be used [11.23] throughout one's entire life.

´ This dynamic process results from ongoing study of the Word of God, prayer, reflection, and striving to apply the Writings to daily life.

´ The Core Curriculum involves parents, teachers, institutions and the entire community in the learning process. Spiritual Assemblies use the Core Curriculum as a tool to support and encourage teachers and parents, organize training programs, oversee Baha'i educational programs, and plan ways to utilize the talents of all members of their community. Local institutions identify individuals who can be trained to serve the community by training teachers, supporting parents, offering workshops on marriage, or offering race unity training; each of these training programs serves to uplift and unify the entire community.

The Sacred Texts indicate a rich variety of subjects to include in a spiritual curriculum. The Core Curriculum organizes these topics according to Baha'u'llah's verse:

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Education: A Compilation, p. 5 #9

Many communities are now using the Core Curriculum, and, as this is an evolving, organic process, these communities may look quite different. Teachers trained in the Core Curriculum may create vastly different lessons using the same basic structure and suggestions. The Core Curriculum encourages a wide variety of learning experiences based on a shared educational process and content. A series of curriculum booklets support the training process by providing the framework and structure for teachers to tailor learning experiences to the needs of the local community.

The National Spiritual Assembly established a National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Baha'i School to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies with these training programs. The National Teacher Training Center can be reached at 3208 South State Road, Davison, MI 48423; phone 810-653-5033, fax 810-653-7181, email louhelen@usbnc.org

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTES

[11.24] As the term "institute" has assumed various uses in the Baha'i community, a word of clarification is needed. The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centers of Baha'i learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
Ridvan, 153 (1996), message to the Baha'is of the World

The endeavor of individuals to conduct study classes in their homes, the sponsorship by the institutions of occasional courses of instruction, and the informal activities of the community, though important, are not adequate for the education and training of a rapidly expanding community. It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given

talents allow. There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized, formally conducted programs of training on a regular schedule.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
Ridvan, 153 (1996), message to the Baha'is of the World

Training institutes and other centers of learning are an indispensable element of a sustained endeavor to advance this process, and to ensure that the essential deepening of new believers is not neglected, that they develop the necessary skills to effectively teach the Faith, and that an opportunity is provided for all Baha'is, new and veteran, to embark on a systematic study of the fundamental verities of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. We look to your communities to make an energetic response to the call for such [11.25] institutes, and to develop a wide variety of approaches fitted to the needs of the diverse components of your population.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
Ridvan, 153 (1996), message to the Followers of Baha'u'llah

The development of human resources on a large scale requires that the establishment of institutes be viewed in a new light. In many regions, it has become imperative to create institutes as organizational structures dedicated to systematic training. The purpose of such training is to endow ever-growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number of people„adults, youth and children. This purpose can best be achieved through well-organized, formal programs consisting of courses that follow appropriately designed curricula.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, December 26, 1995,
to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

As an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly, the training institute should be charged with the task of developing human resources in all or part of a country. The requirements of expansion and consolidation in the country or region will dictate the complexity of its organization. In some instances, the institute may consist of a group of dedicated believers with a well-defined program and some administrative arrangement that enables it to offer regular training courses. In many cases, in addition to a group of teachers associated with it, the institute will require part- and full-time staff, for whom assistance from the funds of the Faith may be necessary. The institute needs access to some physical facilities in which it can conduct courses and, at some stage of its development, may require a building of its own. Irrespective of whether or not an institute has its own physical facilities, its teachers must offer courses both at a central location and in the villages and towns so that an appreciable number of believers can enter its programs. The complexity and number of courses offered by an institute, as well as the size of its staff and the pool of teachers from which it draws, may call for the appointment of a board to direct its affairs. When the region under the influence of an

institute is large, it may have branches serving specific areas, each with its own administration.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, December 26, 1995,
to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors

APPENDIX C
EDUCATIONAL SITES IN THE UNITED STATES

[11.26] The National Spiritual Assembly has established five permanent schools and institutes to serve the community, as well as a network of nearly forty regional schools. In addition, many Local Spiritual Assemblies have established local Baha'i schools to serve their educational needs.

The three permanent schools are: the Bosch Baha'i School in Santa Cruz, CA; the Green Acre Baha'i School in Eliot, ME; and the Louhelen Baha'i School in Davison, MI. The schools operate year round, holding a succession of programs varying in length from a weekend to a week. Programs focus on a wide variety of Baha'i topics, and are taught by a number of highly-skilled teachers. In addition, these Schools also serve as sites for meetings and conferences, both for the Baha'i community and the community at large. For a full catalog of events at these schools, write to the addresses listed below.

The two permanent institutes are: the Louis G. Gregory Baha'i Institute in Hemingway, SC; and the Native American Baha'i Institute in Houck, AZ, on the Navajo Reservation. These institutes may also hold occasional programs of short duration focused on specific Baha'i topics, but their primary mission is to serve the populations surrounding the institutes. The institutes are involved in a number of social and economic development projects, including GED and literacy programs, and a variety of programs for children. In addition, the Louis Gregory Institute broadcasts community affairs and other programming through its radio station, WLGI.

A network of nearly forty regional schools has been established. These schools are administered by committees appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly to create schools serving a large region, such as a state or a part of a state. Sessions vary in length from a weekend to ten days. Some schools are held once a year, while other regional schools hold as many as four sessions a year, one in each season.

Many Local Spiritual Assemblies have established regular classes through instituting a local Baha'i school, often utilizing the Core Curriculum (see Appendix A). These schools are numerous and diverse. One pattern for local Baha'i schools is to hold weekly [11.27] classes, often on the weekend, serving all ages of a Baha'i community, but most especially serving the children. Local Assemblies seeking input on establishing a school or suggestions for a local school's development should feel free to contact the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen or the National Education and Schools Office.

Bosch Baha'i School
500 Comstock Lane

Santa Cruz, CA 95060
408/423-3387
bosch@usbnc.org

Green Acre Baha'i School
188 Main St
Eliot, ME 03903
207/439-7200
greenacre@usbnc.org

Louhelen Baha'i School
and National Teacher Training Center
3208 S.State Rd
Davison, MI 48423
810/653-5033
louhelen@usbnc.org

Louis G. Gregory Baha'i Institute
Rt. 2, Box 71
Hemingway, SC 29554
803/558-5093
lgi@usbnc.org

Native American Baha'i Institute
P.O. Box 167
Houck, AZ 86506
520/521-1063
nabi@usbnc.org

National Education and Schools Office
1233 Central St.
Evanston, IL 60201
schools@usbnc.org

APPENDIX D
GIRL SCOUT AND BOY SCOUT RELIGIOUS EMBLEM

[11.28] The Unity of Mankind Emblem for Girl Instructor Scouts and Boy Scouts is earned by completing a six-, nine-, or twelve-month program under the supervision of an instructor appointed by a Local Spiritual Assembly or Registered Group. The program is designed to provide the candidate with a stronger spiritual foundation of the Scout Oath by expanding it to include all of mankind. The program seeks to help the candidate understand, through study and action, how an individual can make a contribution toward the goal of world peace.

The various levels will unify knowledge and action by proposing specific goals of learning, to be followed by projects that will illustrate the candidate's acquired knowledge and conclude with a practical life experience.

Since one of the purposes of the program is for the child to become comfortable

meeting with his or her Local Spiritual Assembly, the child should be encouraged to meet with the Assembly from time to time in order to report on his or her progress in the program.

Once the candidate completes the program, the certificate of enrollment,„which is attached with each program booklet,„should be completed, copied (the originals should be kept in the Assembly's files), and enclosed when ordering the emblem. The Assembly, or candidate's family in the absence of an Assembly, should assume the responsibility for purchasing the emblem.

These programs are administered by the Baha'i Faith but are offered through Girl Scouts of America and Boy Scouts of America. For more information about the program, please contact the National Teaching Office at: telephone (847) 733-3498, email: NTC@USBNC.ORG or post: 1233 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201.

12„EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

NEW STAGE IN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS WORK

[12.1] The Baha'i community has entered a new stage in its external affairs work with an impressive record of success at a time when widespread disorder has thrust society into a worsening disequilibrium. A feeling of rudderlessness looms as world leaders seem unable to provide coherent answers to the questions of the times. There is a sense of a vacuum in the absence of any moral leadership. Despite all this, or because of it, people in various countries are increasingly seeking alternative means of asserting themselves. The success of the Baha'i community is signified by the heartening response its work in external affairs has evoked. Since its administrative system demonstrates its unique capacity to unify people in global action, the non-Baha'i world is turning to its members as a major resource in assisting with canalizing the forces for development and peace. The immense challenge posed by this response has yet to be thoughtfully addressed.

The Lesser Peace anticipated by Baha'u'llah will, of course, be established by the nations themselves. It seems clear that two entities will push for its realization: the governments of the world, and the peoples of the world through the instrumentality of the organizations of civil society. But to lend spiritual impetus to the momentum which that grand attainment will generate, the need for a Baha'i strategy is evident. One of its expressions should be the exertion of a kind of leadership, principally a moral leadership, by coherently, comprehensively and continually imparting our ideas for the advancement of civilization, and this through a unified voice that because of the diverse composition of our community could come to be regarded as representative of the aspirations of the peoples of the world.

[12.2] The functions of the external affairs work of the Baha'i International Community for the immediate future are thus defined.

Purpose of External Affairs Efforts

The purpose of the external affairs efforts of the Baha'i International

Community is focused on two objectives:

1. To influence the processes towards world peace. So as not to dissipate our limited resources, our efforts will concentrate on human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development.

2. To defend the Faith, as in the case of the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran.

This two-pronged purpose will be universally adopted by the Baha'i community and become the focus for our diplomatic and public information work at the international, national and local levels. Diplomatic work involves the management of our relations with the United Nations and with governments, while public information work involves the management of our relations with the public in general. A collateral outcome of the work in these two aspects will be to attract to the Faith "capable and receptive souls" with the aim of enrolling some of them.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated September, 1994, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

The Baha'i world community will expand its endeavors in...external affairs, and thus continue to collaborate directly with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world. In the arena of external affairs, efforts will be aimed at influencing the processes towards world peace, particularly through the community's involvement in the promotion of human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. In the pursuit of these themes, the Baha'i International Community's United Nations Office will seek ways to reinforce the ties between the Baha'is and the United Nations. Similarly, the Office of Public Information will assist the Baha'i institutions to utilize these themes towards greater proclamation of the Faith. Defense of the rights of the Baha'is in Iran and increased efforts to emancipate the Faith in that country and other countries where it is proscribed will constitute a vital part of our dealings with governments and non-governmental organizations. In all such respects the Baha'i friends and institutions [12.3] are urged to be alert to the importance of activities in external affairs and to give renewed attention to them.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 153, to the Baha'is of the world.

RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD AT LARGE

The events of the past year have demonstrated clearly that the enemies of the Faith are intensifying their attacks on the precious Cause of God. The Five Year Plan [1974-1979] calls for a planned and sustained effort, under the close supervision of each National Spiritual Assembly, to foster cordial relations with responsible government officials and prominent people. In every country where the doors of contact with those in authority are open to the friends, the National Spiritual Assembly should, as indicated in our letter of Naw-Ruz 131,

appoint a special committee to be given the task of finding effective ways of informing the authorities about the Faith, of dispelling any misgivings and of removing any misapprehensions which may be deceitfully created by those who are striving to extinguish the fire of God's Faith. We cannot overemphasize the necessity of this activity and the need to use utmost tact and wisdom in pursuing it, for, not only will it facilitate the further proclamation and recognition of the Faith, but, as opposition to and misconceptions about the aims and purposes of the Baha'is increase, when a moment of crisis arrives the institutions of the Faith may know where to turn, whose advice and assistance to seek, and how to minimize the effects of opposition.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 25, 1975, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

The emergence from obscurity, which has been so marked a feature of the Cause of God during the first five years of the Seven Year Plan [1979-1986], has been attended by changes, both external and internal, affecting the Baha'i world community. Externally, there are signs of a crystallization of a public image of the Cause„largely uninformed, however friendly„while internally growing maturity and confidence are indicated by increased administrative ability, a desire for Baha'i communities to render service to the larger body of mankind and a deepening understanding of the relevance of the divine Message to modern problems. Both these aspects of change must be taken into consideration as we enter the third and final phase of the Seven Year Plan.

...Persistently greater and greater efforts must be made to [12.4] acquaint the leaders of the world, in all departments of life, with the true nature of Baha'u'llah's revelation as the sole hope for the pacification and unification of the world.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 1984, to the Baha'is of the World

Concerning the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government, the House of Justice fully agrees with your view that the Baha'is must now do all in their power to promote this transition. This requires several related activities, all of which are goals of the present Seven Year Plan.... [One of the activities] is the proclamation of the Faith to all strata of society, and in particular to those in authority and to leaders of thought so that those who hold the direction of peoples in their hands will learn accurately about the nature and tenets of the Faith and will grow to respect it and implement its principles....

Undoubtedly, as these developments are taking place, the counsel the institutions of the Faith can give to governments, the pattern of world administration offered by the Baha'i community and the great humanitarian projects which will be launched under the aegis of the Universal House of Justice, will exercise a great influence on the course of progress.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 19, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1428

National Baha'i communities have organized and successfully conducted interreligious conferences, peace seminars, symposiums on racism and other subjects on which we have a specific contribution to make, often achieving widespread publicity and the interests of highly-placed leaders of society. Baha'i youth, inspired and uplifted by the vision and idealism of "the new race of men" have, through their many gatherings, attracted large numbers of their compeers and galvanized their own members to direct their lives towards service in the many fields in which a rich harvest awaits the dedicated Baha'i worker.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1987, to the Baha'is of the World

A remarkable display of interest in this [Baha'i world] community by governments, civil authorities, prominent personalities and humanitarian organizations is increasingly apparent. Not only are the community's laws and principles, organization and way of life being investigated, but its advice and active help are also being [12.5] sought for the alleviation of social problems and the carrying out of humanitarian activities.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 1988, to the Baha'is of the World

There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Baha'i world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 1988, to the Baha'is of the World

(See also in this Chapter Appendix A, "The National Spiritual Assembly's Secretariat for External Affairs'; Chapter 7, "Teaching and Consolidation")

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

Applying the Principle of Non-Involvement in Politics

The House of Justice will determine, as particular circumstances warrant, how the Baha'is and their national and local institutions will relate to their respective governments.

The general policy already enunciated by Shoghi Effendi in The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pages 63-67, should be scrupulously upheld by the friends. However, as the Faith emerges from obscurity, the application of certain aspects of this policy will require the clarification of the House of Justice. With the passage of time, practices in the political realm will definitely undergo the profound changes anticipated in the Baha'i writings. As a consequence, what we understand now of the policy of non-involvement in

politics will also undergo a change; but as Shoghi Effendi has written, this instruction, "at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West.'

In view of the necessity of the Baha'i community to relate to governments, whether for reasons of defending its persecuted members or of responding to opportunities to be of service, a correct [12.6] understanding of what is legitimate Baha'i action in the face of the policy of non-interference with government affairs is bound to be difficult to achieve on the part of individual friends. The force of circumstances, operating internally and externally, is pressing the Baha'i community into certain relationships with governments. Hence, it is important that decisions as to the conduct of such relationships be made by authorized institutions of the Faith and not by individuals. In matters of this kind, given the utter complexity of human affairs with which the Baha'i community must increasingly cope spiritually and practically, individual judgment is not sufficient.

...There may be...situations in which significant questions being considered by a government are so intimately related to fundamental principles of our Faith, and the conditions are such, that the maintenance of strict neutrality on the part of the Baha'i community would not be in the best interests of either the Faith or society. Awareness of this probability should, however, not cause the friends to go at a tangent and take such sensitive matters into their own hands. In any such situation the National Spiritual Assembly must weigh carefully the consequences, pro and con, of any contemplated action and carry out its decision, preferably with the foreknowledge and consent of the House of Justice. The friends must learn to appreciate this new situation, to acquiesce to the prerogative of their elected institutions to decide on questions involving or affecting relations with their governments, and evince confidence in the incontrovertible promise of Baha'u'llah to protect His community.

Considering the unusual challenges facing National Spiritual Assemblies, particularly resulting from the persecutions in Iran and the issuance of the Peace Statement, the Universal House of Justice will surely continue to guide these institutions to relate to their governments in ways which will preserve the essentials of the policy of noninvolvement in politics.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 23, 1987, to an individual believer

Loyalty to Government
In every country where any of this people reside, they must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness. This is that which hath been revealed at the behest of Him Who is the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days.
Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, pp. 22-23

[12.7] To all administrative regulations which the civil authorities have issued from time to time, or will issue in the future in that land, as in all

other countries, the Baha'i community, faithful to its sacred obligations towards its government, and conscious of its civic duties, has yielded, and will continue to yield implicit obedience.
Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 372

If they [the Baha'is] become involved in the issues the Governments of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Baha'i pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated December 21, 1948, to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1453

Baha'is must live the Baha'i life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by the authorities. If local, state, or federal authorities actively prohibit Baha'i life or some aspect of it, then Baha'is must submit to these requirements in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved such as a denial of faith. This Baha'is cannot do under any circumstances. The lives the friends lead will prove to be the greatest teachers.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 23, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Political Activity
By the principle of noninterference in political matters we should not mean that only corrupt politics and partial and sectarian politics are to be avoided, but that any pronouncement on any current system of politics connected with any government must be shunned. We should not only take sides with no political party, group or system actually in use, but we should also refuse to commit ourselves to any statement which may be interpreted as being sympathetic or antagonistic to any existing political organization or philosophy. The attitude of the Baha'is must be one of complete aloofness. They are neither for nor against any system of politics. Not that they are the ill-wishers of their respective governments but that due to certain administrative machinery of their Faith they prefer not to get entangled in political affairs and to be misinterpreted and misunderstood by their countrymen.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 8, 1934, enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 30, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The principle of non-involvement in politics implies that Baha'is do not allow themselves to be drawn into the struggles and [12.8] conflicting interests which divide the many factions and groups of their fellowmen. This principle is clearly enunciated by the Guardian on pages 64 to 67 of The World Order of Baha'u'llah in the passage beginning:

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster....

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 31, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

But if a certain person does enter into party politics and labors for the ascendancy of one party over another, and continues to do it against expressed appeals and warnings of the Assembly, then the Assembly has the right to refuse him the right to vote in Baha'i elections.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 30

The same sanction (i.e., removal of voting rights) should apply to those who persistently refuse to dissociate themselves from political and ecclesiastical activities.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 87

Voting
The friends may vote, if they can do it, without identifying themselves with one party or another. To enter the arena of party politics is surely detrimental to the best interests of the Faith and will harm the Cause.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, pp. 29-30

No vote cast, or office undertaken, by a Baha'i should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office holder, of the entire program of any political party.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 29

It remains for the individuals to so use their right to vote as to keep aloof from party politics, and always bear in mind that they are voting on the merits of the individual, rather than because he belongs to one party or another. The matter must be made perfectly [12.9] clear to the individuals, who will be left free to exercise their discretion and judgment.
Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 30

As a matter of principle, the Faith regards choices in electing individuals to office and voting on issues as being a private matter. Baha'is are therefore left free to perform these functions according to the dictates of their own consciences. It would thus be out of order for a Baha'i institution to instruct the believers as to how they should vote in elections or on issues within or outside the Baha'i community. One has to trust that the Baha'i friends will act in such private functions according to the principles of their sacred beliefs.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September, 1995, to an individual believer

Independent Candidates
Active support...of an individual who has announced his candidacy for political office is not permissible to Baha'is. Even if the person is not attached to a political party, the very fact of promoting his candidacy over that of other competitors is an act of partisanship, which is inimical to the principles of the Faith. As you well know, campaigning and nominations are forbidden in Baha'i elections. The friends should endeavor to keep in mind the non-partisan

character of the Faith and to employ the attitude of non partisanship, to the greatest extent possible, in the exercise of their civic responsibilities as voters. Baha'i are, of course, free to vote except, in primaries, but should not express support for any candidate.
Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 25, 1992

Baha'i Involvement with Campaigns
In regard to the main question which you have posed, the requirement of Baha'is refraining from political involvement should not be construed merely as a comment on one's integrity; rather, it is a matter of the general state of society and confusion in the realm of politics. To have Baha'is involved in the regular machinery of campaign politics would be to undermine the Faith's essential position of non-partisanship. Therefore, the House of Justice feels that a Baha'i should neither campaign on his own behalf nor do anything to promote his candidacy. Partisan politics, it should be borne in mind, includes not only party affiliation but also campaigning, whether in the context of a political party or not, by setting oneself up against another in a political contest. There is a clear distinction [12.10] which separates those elections which take place in the public arena from those which take place in the Baha'i community, where there is neither campaigning nor nominations. At the same time, in view of the different circumstances involving election to office, it is advisable for the friends to consult their Local Spiritual Assembly or National Spiritual Assembly concerning any specific instance in which a Baha'i would be involved in a public election.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 6, 1995, to an individual believer

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Political Activity")

Contact with Government Officials
I entirely agree with you that non-interference in politics does not imply non-association on the part of the friends with the outside world. I hope you will impress the friends with the necessity of maintaining close, but not too intimate relationships, with the authorities, the foreign representatives, and the leaders of public thought in the capital. They should be on their guard, however, lest too close an association should lead, imperceptibly to compromise in the principles which we cherish and uphold. They must mix with all classes of society without associating themselves with their policies and schemes.
Letter written by Shoghi Effendi, dated October 8, 1927, to an individual believer

It is ver y important that they should know how we stand and what is our attitude towards some of the outstanding problems and issues that face the world in the present day. These are very difficult questions and most delicate, but the Master's spirit will surely guide you and inspire you to do what is proper and wise.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 4, 1932, to an individual believer

It is our supreme obligation to endeavor to bring the knowledge of this Revelation to the highest authorities and the leading personalities among our countrymen, but to refrain from associating ourselves or of identifying our Faith, with their political pursuits, their conflicting ambitions and party programs.
Letter written by Shoghi Effendi, dated April 15, 1932, to an individual believer

Baha'i individuals and institutions must first obtain the permission of the National Spiritual Assembly (Office of the Secretary for External Affairs in Washington, D.C.) before contacting agencies and officials of the federal government on Baha'i matters. They must obtain permission from Regional Councils before contacting state legislatures [12.11] and state governors. Individual state legislators, mayors, city councils and other local government agencies are under the jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. After permission is given, the friends should proceed with wisdom and choose their words carefully in their communication with the officials.

When Spiritual Assemblies or individuals are asked by the National Spiritual Assembly to contact government officials, they should not quote from the Baha'i writings or from letters from the institutions unless requested to do so.

When Baha'is write to or speak with government officials on matters not directly related to Baha'i issues, they should not imply that they are spokespersons for the Faith. Confusion has been caused by Baha'is implying that their personal opinion is the official Baha'i position; a distinction must be made between the two.

Of course, individuals can exercise their right to contact government representatives and express their views on non-Baha'i matters as their consciences dictate. It is on their representing the Faith or providing what might be construed as an official Baha'i position that the National Assembly wishes to place certain limits.

Petitions and Letter-Writing Campaigns
The believers are free to participate in campaigns, to sign petitions or write letters to bring certain matters to the attention of the public and public officials. However, they should not identify themselves as Baha'is unless encouraged to do so by a Baha'i institution. Local institutions should refrain from signing petitions and participating in letter-writing campaigns without the approval of the National Spiritual Assembly. Regarding petitions and campaigns with national or international implications, the friends should contact the National Spiritual Assembly (Office of the Secretary for External Affairs in Washington, D.C.).

Credentials
From time to time it becomes necessary to provide letters of introduction to federal or state government authorities to confirm that an individual is or is not a Baha'i in good standing. Local Spiritual Assemblies should forward all such requests for introduction to the National Spiritual Assembly, which

reserves the exclusive right to introduce individuals as Baha'is to federal or state government authorities.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PROMINENT PERSONS, OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Contacting Prominent People

A very important activity which has been pursued effectively in all too few countries, is the undertaking by the National Spiritual Assembly of a sustained, planned effort to foster cordial relations with prominent people and responsible government officials and to familiarize them personally with the basic tenets and the teachings of the Faith. Such an activity must be carried out with wisdom and discretion, and requires the constant attention of a [12.12] responsible committee as well as periodic review by the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Where successful it can effectively forestall opposition to the Faith and smooth the way for many essential aspects of the development of the Baha'i community.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz, 1974, to All National Spiritual Assemblies

Basically, "people of capacity" are those individuals, no matter in what walk of life they are found, and no matter what their level of education, who demonstrate capacity in various ways. For example, among any group of people there are those who are outstanding because they show a capacity for understanding, for work, for efficient action, for leadership, for drawing other people together, for self-sacrificing and devoted service,„for any number of qualities which enable them to respond actively to the needs of their environment and make a difference to it. In some cases the capacity has already been amply demonstrated; in others it is still latent but can be developed. It is for such people that we should search, since they can quickly become either devoted and active Baha'is or valued collaborators in the work of promoting Baha'i ideals.

People in authority are also often people of capacity, but not always. Indeed one of the major obstacles to progress is when people of little capacity occupy the seat of authority. Nevertheless it is important for Baha'is to cultivate those who are in authority, whether or not they are people of capacity, because it is they who have power to assist or oppose the development of society.

Prominent people may or may not have authority, but by virtue of their prominence they are in the public eye and exert an influence on society, so they need to be acquainted with the Faith and its ideas.

Leaders of thought can be found among the ranks of those in authority and those who are prominent, but also, as you indicate, in less public areas. They exercise an influence, often indirect, on the ideals for which people strive and on the way in which people view the nature of humankind and the condition of society. The lead they give may lie anywhere on a spectrum from great good to depravity. Baha'is need to know who they are and what their influence is, and to judge how best to illumine their thinking through the light of the Faith, or to arouse their admiration for the Cause and its Message.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 6, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[12.13] The friends are encouraged to consult with their Local Spiritual Assemblies when devising strategies to present the Faith to individuals of prominence who live or work in their locality. Universities and colleges present a particularly fertile arena for reaching leaders of thought who have achieved national or international prominence in their field. Because of the many prominent individuals in various fields of endeavor who live in the United States, the National Assembly leaves it up to Local Assemblies to decide whether to contact prominent individuals living in their communities. The National Assembly is available to provide guidance on whether an individual of national prominence has already received Baha'i information should a Local Assembly wish it.

To approach such well-known and important persons is always an extremely delicate matter, since it requires a good deal of wisdom, courage and ability. But those friends who really feel the urge to do so, and possess the necessary qualifications, should cultivate such friendships which, if properly done, can be of an immense benefit to the Cause. In any case, however, the assistance and help of either the local or the National Assembly is not only useful but necessary if important contacts of this sort are to be fruitful and promising. The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Baha'i activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through cooperation and continued exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated August 30, 1933,
to an individual believer, in Lights of Guidance, par. 151

Various individuals, some widely known for their accomplishments, are increasingly making impassioned and thoughtful appeals for attainment of goals that Baha'is are also striving to accomplish. It is understandable that the friends, when meeting or listening to such persons, will want to share the message of Baha'u'llah with them.

However, the National Assembly urges the friends not to approach or contact national and international figures, whom they do not know personally, to teach them the Faith or present the peace statement. The National Assembly fears that a poor impression would be created if the friends were to approach or send Baha'i literature to prominent persons. In the past, dignitaries and celebrities have [12.14] received a deluge of Baha'i material from well-meaning Baha'is or were besieged by such friends at public appearances.

Should Local Assemblies, committees, or individual Baha'is wish to contact a prominent person, they should first inform the National Spiritual Assembly (Office of the Secretary for External Affairs) of their intention. Then a

coordinated approach can be consulted upon should such contact be appropriate.

Greater latitude is allowed when a close relationship (as distinct from a casual acquaintance) exists between a Baha'i and a prominent person. The Baha'is are encouraged to inform the National Spiritual Assembly of such friendships.

Association with Other Organizations
The National Spiritual Assembly has refrained from examining the thousands of non-governmental organizations on a case by case basis, leaving the Local Spiritual Assemblies and friends to determine for themselves whether, in light of the Baha'i teachings on political non-involvement, their membership or association with a particular organization is in harmony with Baha'i principles. In this regard it is important to determine the degree to which its aims and methods approximate the Teachings of Baha'u'llah. The more closely the organization fits the principles and teachings of the Faith, the more closely the friends can participate as Baha'is. The friends must ensure that their participation does not compromise any principle of the Faith, nor give the impression that they are acting as Baha'i representatives. Baha'i institutions, on the other hand, must be more cautious when considering membership since they automatically represent the Faith in all their activities.

Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of his Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic cooperation, Islam, and Comparative Religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact.
Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 51

The Guardian does not see how Baha'i participation, with other organizations and religious bodies, in a nonpolitical meeting to promote civic unity and welfare along some line can be considered political. Much as the friends must guard against in any way [12.15] ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote in entire accord with our teachings„such as, for instance, better race relations.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated November 21, 1948, to an individual believer

The great, the historic feature of this period is the emergence of the Faith from obscurity.... The time has come for the Baha'i community to become more involved in the life of the society around it, without in the least supporting any of the world's moribund and divisive concepts, or slackening its direct teaching efforts, but rather, by association, exerting its influence towards

unity, demonstrating its ability to settle differences by consultation rather than by confrontation, violence or schism, and declaring its faith in the divine purpose of human existence.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 1985 to the Baha'is of the World

The Universal House of Justice states that all the forces which are focused on accomplishing the unity of mankind and establishing peace among nations are influenced by the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. It is little wonder, then, that the programs of many organizations contain features that are consonant with the aims of the Faith.

The National Assembly encourages the friends to associate with like-minded organizations. Individual Baha'is are free to decide whether or how much they should participate in the activities of other groups. But in the process they need to ensure that their participation does not compromise the teachings of the Faith.

Criteria for Deciding on Association
The following questions must be asked: Are the aims of the organization compatible with Baha'i laws and principles? Is membership open to persons of all racial and religious backgrounds? Is it free from partisan politics and political controversies? Does it refrain from civil disobedience and violence? To answer these questions it would be necessary to review carefully an organization's activities and charter.

Association of Baha'i institutions with other organizations requires close scrutiny because the activities of Baha'i Assemblies and committees imply automatic representation of the Faith. Local institutions should satisfy themselves that the aims and methods of the organization in question approximate the teachings of Baha'u'llah. In general, the closer the approximation, the closer [12.16] can be the relationship. At times an official relationship would be not only appropriate but advisable.

Generally, the Local Spiritual Assembly is in the best position to make such determinations in consideration of these guidelines and of various statements in the Writings. Should the friends have doubts, they may call the National Assembly's Office of the Secretary for External Affairs.

When Permission to Associate Is Needed
In cases where organizations or programs have a national or international scope, Assemblies should obtain permission from the National Spiritual Assembly before participating.

National Efforts Reinforced by Local Activities
The National Spiritual Assembly works with several worthy national organizations and wishes that Baha'is find opportunities to participate in local programs arranged by similar organizations. The success of the National Assembly's efforts to develop its relations with progressive organizations will no doubt depend to a large extent on the quality of Baha'i collaboration with

such organizations at the grassroots level.

Consistency, Commitment Important

Developing relations with other groups usually requires a commitment for an indefinite period of time. For the relationship to be effective, the commitment must be shared by at least a few of the friends in the local community or nearby communities, and it must be demonstrable and continuous. Baha'is who become involved serve as representatives of the local community and, therefore, should carry out their obligations and follow through on their promises with consistency and in exemplary fashion.

PROMOTING UNIVERSAL PEACE AND THE LESSER PEACE

Any activity on the part of Baha'is to influence the processes toward the Lesser Peace, such as the convocation of world leaders, should be undertaken with the understanding that the achievement of the Lesser Peace is dependent on the initiatives of non-Baha'i leaders and not on the basis of any Baha'i scheme. In this regard, the following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer:

Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Baha'i plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace be established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Baha'u'llah and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Baha'i superstate„your view on this subject is quite correct and in [12.17] full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in "The Unfoldment of World Civilization." (See The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters [Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991], pp. 161-206)

It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace. It should be borne in mind in this regard that because of the political gravity of the decisions involved in the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and the differing political attitudes which it evokes, certain actions on the part of the Baha'i community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying the need for a convocation of world leaders, as does the Peace Statement, and initiating the political processes towards its realization. Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently of any Baha'i plan or action, Baha'is should not be inert. Indeed, they may promote the concept of world peace with all that it implies without allowing their activities to assume a character that could be identified with the political processes which its realization will require.

It is not the wish of the Universal House of Justice to dampen anyone's enthusiasm for assisting in the developments towards peace, but it is critical that the friends understand the proprieties to be observed by the Baha'i

community in a matter of such vital importance. If, for example, the Baha'is attempt to take a leading role in organizing events associated with the anticipated convocation of world leaders, their motives could be misunderstood. The risk is that Baha'is might act in a manner which would put non-Baha'is in the awkward position of appearing to endorse a specifically Baha'i vision or make them feel that they are seeking to impose the requirements of our religion upon others. One needs to be aware that we Baha'is can, in our zeal, easily overwhelm others and even, owing to the wariness that we might inadvertently engender, cause them to lose sight of the practical importance of establishing world peace.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 14, 1996, to an individual believer

Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace is not dependent on any Baha'i plan or action, and although it will not represent [12.18] the ultimate goal humanity is destined to reach in the Golden Age, our community has a responsibility to lend spiritual impetus to the processes towards that peace. The need at this exact time is to so intensify our efforts in building the Baha'i System that we will attract the confirmations of Baha'u'llah and thus invoke a spiritual atmosphere that will accrue to the quickening of these processes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 153 to the Baha'is of the World

The fact that Baha'i institutions will not be directly involved in the eventual convocation of the world leaders and in effecting the political unity of nations does not mean that the Baha'is are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of humanity. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, by living the Teachings, and by fashioning the instruments of the Baha'i Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Baha'is are constantly engaged in laying the foundation for world peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal. The Baha'is should do whatever they can within the context of their Baha'i teaching and consolidation plans and also through their professional and other regular activities to promulgate universal peace.

...This (they) can do by concentrating on wide and continual dissemination of the Peace Statement whose contents should be known by the generality of humanity, on engaging people from all walks of life in discussions on peace, and on instilling and encouraging a sense of personal commitment to the prerequisites of peace. In a word, what is needed now is a worldwide consciousness of not only the requirements but also the possibility, and inevitability, of peace. Therefore, our immediate and inescapable task as Baha'is is to imbue the populations with such hope.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 17, 1987, to an individual believer

He was very glad to see that you are active in representing the Cause among

Peace Societies and gradually bringing them to contact our principles on that all-important subject. The sooner they come to appreciate the significance of the Message of Baha'u'llah the sooner will they be able to bring about the realization of their object and hope and rehabilitate our perturbed society.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 11, 1932,
in Lights of Guidance, 1994 ed., par. 1382

[12.19] Its [The Promise of World Peace] delivery to national governmental leaders having been virtually completed, its contents must now be conveyed, by all possible means, to peoples everywhere from all walks of life. This is a necessary part of the teaching work in our time and must be pursued with unabated vigor.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan 1988 to the Baha'is of the World

Promoting Race Unity
With regard to the question of what public role might be played by the Baha'i Faith in America to ameliorate in the immediately forseeable future the plight of African-American males, the size and influence of the Baha'i community are, alas, too limited for it to have a determining impact on conditions which have, after all, been hundreds of years in the making. As is well known, since at least the middle of the last century significant numbers of Americans, both black and white, have long labored, often with immense resourcefulness, to counteract the baleful legacy of racism in their country, in all its complex dimensions, structural and otherwise. Indeed, when one meditates on the sweep of United States history, one can see how unlikely it is that the bitter predicament of black males will be quickly or easily resolved. The obstacles are not of such character that, for example, legal reforms could dissolve them. This is not a counsel of dispair. Nor it is an equivocation or suggestion that the requirements of divine justice ought to be deferred. Nor is it to say that Baha'is have no critical role to play. On the contrary, the concern is with Baha'i fundamentals, with looking deeply into underlying causes and identifying strategic lines of action which make the wisest use of our limited resources at this point in the development of the Baha'i community.

If we are to avoid becoming entrammeled in the enervating coils of cynicism which are a characteristic of this age of transition, we must, as the "custodians of...the forces of love," ground our efforts in indomitable faith.
In the future the Cause of God will spread throughout America; millions will be enlisted under its banner and race prejudice will finally be exercised from the body politic. Of this have no doubt. It is inexorable, because it is the Will of Almighty God. However, as the House of Justice has been trying to get the friends to understand for some time, the necessary precondition to translation of our community's social vision into reality is a massive expansion in the number of committed, deepened believers who are well-grounded in the essentials of the Cause. Those [12.20] who fail to comprehend the urgency assigned to the objective of achieving a large expansion have obviously failed to appreciate the moral imperative behind this aim.

Parallel to the process of large-scale enrollment, the institutions of the Faith, including those at the grassroots of the community, will gradually come to function with greater efficiency and increasing harmony, thereby enhancing their potential in stimulating the processes of social development.

Concerning the comparison you have drawn in your letter between the situation of the Baha'i community in Iran and the African-American people generally, it is noteworthy that, while the plight of the Iranian friends is grievous, it is also in some essential respects far more tractable. Furthermore, since the community is organized around the divine Teachings and empowered by the Word of God, the effects of victimization on the Iranian believers is likely to prove, in the long view, less devastating than the effects of that which has been inflicted upon the African-Americans. More-over, it is wholly conceivable that a tiny handful of secular and clerical rulers who control the government there could, more or less at the stroke of a pen, effectively emancipate that community from the bulk of its practical difficulties. Nonetheless, we are the only ones in the world who would so persistently direct the focus of international attention towards achieving the aim of lifting the shackles from our co-religionists. There is no one else to take the lead.

The House of Justice sympathizes with your frustrations. It feels, however, that the best contribution which the friends can make is to carry on with work of the kind you are already doing, demonstrating the Baha'i spirit to others, showing their love for mankind and patiently, determinedly working to bring about a change in the hearts and minds of those they are able to reach. It is a question of being in this struggle for the long term, of advancing the issue as much as feasible, given the conditions with which one has to work. In this respect, the powerful example of the Hand of the Cause Louis Gregory is an invaluable source of inspiration and encouragement.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated 1 April, 1996, to an individual believer

The Term "New World Order'
Occasionally, in an area there is negative publicity or comments about the term "new world order." It is important that the Baha'i community clearly uphold the distinction between the popular use of the term, with its sometimes dark implications of an oppressive political machinery, and the life-giving principle that the term embodies [12.21] within the context of the Baha'i teachings. The collected letters of Shoghi Effendi on the theme of world order, published under the title The World Order of Baha'u'llah , present in detail the Baha'i teachings on this matter.

International Initiatives
Since the inception of the League of Nations in 1920 and later of the United Nations in 1945, the Baha'i community has consistently supported initiatives that create international instruments indispensable for the ultimate emergence of a new world order. Before supporting any initiative of the United Nations, the National Spiritual Assembly receives the guidance and permission of the Universal House of Justice.

During the last decade, the National Assembly has supported the ratification of various human rights treaties, including the U.N. convention against genocide, the U.N. convention against torture, the international covenant on civil and political rights, the U.N. convention on the elimination of race discrimination; and will continue to support the U.N. convention on the rights of women and the U.N. convention on the rights of the child. The National Spiritual Assembly is under no illusion as to the present-day effectiveness of the United Nations system but knows that it is a welcome step in the direction of world unity.

The organizations of civil society have had a tremendous impact in the international arena in recent years, especially through the several recent United Nations global conferences. In fact, non-governmental organizations are frequently the agents of change in government policy and action. The Baha'is will continue to collaborate with other groups interested in issues of concern to Baha'i institutions such as human rights, the status of women and global prosperity.

The Issue of the Death Penalty

Baha'u'llah provides for capital punishment in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Therefore, if working with organizations that advocate the abolition of the death penalty, the friends should make their reservations on this issue clear by stating that they are not in a position, on principle, to support the elimination of the death penalty.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

Contacting National Media

Local Spiritual Assemblies, local committees and individual Baha'is should not contact national media (e.g. television or radio networks, national or international wire services, newspapers or magazines with international, national or statewide distribution) without first contacting the Office of Public Information.

When the Baha'is find that programs or articles in international and national media contain errors about the Faith, it is essential that they inform the Office of Public Information which will then [12.22] determine the best way to handle the matter. Individuals should not contact editors or program directors to correct the errors.

Should such programs or articles appear in local media, the friends should bring the matter to the attention of their Local Spiritual Assembly or group. Isolated believers can notify their Auxiliary Board members, their assistants, or the Local Assembly whose extension teaching goals include the area where the program or article appeared.

(See also the Public Information Handbook, available from the Office of Public Information in New York. The Handbook contains detailed information regarding all aspects of public information work. Also see in this Chapter, Section entitled "Letters to the Editor."

Contacting Persian Language Media
In the case of Persian language media, the friends may wish to consult with the Persian/American Affairs Office at the Baha'i National Center)

Public Image of the Faith
The Faith is as yet in its infancy. Despite its emergence from obscurity, even now the vast majority of the human race remains ignorant of its existence; moreover, the vast majority of its adherents are relatively new Baha'is. The change implied by this new stage in its evolution is that whereas heretofore this tender plant was protected in its obscurity from the attention of external elements, it has now become exposed. This exposure invites close observation, and that observation will eventually lead to opposition in various quarters. So far from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public. A greater effort, a greater care must now be exercised to ensure its protection against the malice of the ignorant and the unwisdom of its friends.
The Universal House of Justice,
in Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah

As the Baha'i community becomes nationally known and its resources and experience are better recognized, we can anticipate increased scrutiny from the media.

The media have generally given favorable coverage to the Baha'is due to the persecution of Baha'is in Iran. But as the situation in Iran improves, we can expect that journalists will probably begin asking more probing and challenging questions about the tenets and history of the Faith and the life of its adherents.

If local media do not have updated and accurate material [12.23] about the Faith, they will no doubt go to sources outside the Faith for information, which may not be either accurate or objective.

Use of Baha'i Terms with the Media
In public information, a wise and careful approach to publicity and contact with the media is required. The Baha'is must often put aside their uniquely Baha'i perspective in order to imagine that the meaning of certain concepts and terms will not make sense to people who are not Baha'is. "National Assembly," "Auxiliary Board Member," or "Manifestation of God," and "progressive revelation" have little meaning to someone who has limited or no knowledge of the Faith. Concepts like world government and compulsory education are, when given superficial treatment, often threatening and confusing.

Letters to the Editor
We feel that the crux of the problem rests on whether the expression of views on a subject affects the interests of the Cause. This applies even though believers do not identify themselves as Baha'is. Of course if they do so identify themselves any expression of opinion would obviously affect the interests of the Cause. Whenever the interests of the Cause may be involved, or

the friends are uncertain about the matter, they should seek consultation with the administrative institution of the area in which they live and abide by its decision.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 14, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Individual Baha'is and Local Spiritual Assemblies are encouraged to write letters to the editors of their local newspapers which correlate the teachings of the Faith to the problems of the world. Such letters should be reviewed by the Local Spiritual Assembly before submission to the newspaper. Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual Baha'is should not write letters to national publications before contacting the Office of the Secretary for External Affairs.

Baha'is are free to write letters to the editors of publications to express their personal views if they do not identify themselves as Baha'is, imply that they represent the Faith or a Baha'i community, or discuss the Baha'i Faith. If individuals are uncertain about the relationship of their letters to the interests of the Faith, they should consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly.

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Public Information Representatives and Committees")

Publicity
Publicity itself should be well conceived, dignified, and reverent. A flamboyant approach which may succeed in drawing much [12.24] initial attention to the Cause may ultimately prove to have produced a revulsion which would require great effort to overcome. The standard of dignity and reverence set by the beloved Guardian should always be upheld, particularly in musical and dramatic items; and photographs of the Master should not be used indiscriminately.
The Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 118

Uses of Pictures of 'Abdu'l-Baha
Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have strongly urged the Baha'is to treat the photographs of the Master with the utmost respect and dignity. The National Spiritual Assembly discourages the use of portraits and photographs of 'Abdu'l-Baha in contacts with the media. The seven Houses of Worship and the Baha'i properties in Haifa are effective visual aids.

References to the Faith as an Offshoot of Islam
Several of the friends have expressed concern over the reference of the Baha'i Faith as an "offshoot of Islam'...in the press.

The term "offshoot" is legitimate and appropriate if it is used in the context of explaining the origin of the Faith. However, the term can also create the impression that the Faith is a sect or denomination of another religion.

Therefore, if the Baha'is in the United States see such a reference in their local media, they may wish to ask their Public Information representative to

write a letter to the editor explaining that the Baha'i Faith is an offshoot of Islam only in a historical sense, in the same way that Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism. Such an explanation could also provide an opportunity to introduce the concept of progressive revelation.

Use of the Term "Baha'i World Faith'
We realize there are occasions on which the use of the term "Baha'i World Faith" may be justified and useful. However, it is our hope that the friends will gradually lose the habit of using this term as widely as they do now. The designation "The Baha'i Faith" is more dignified and is preferable. Any adjective added to this name tends to a diminution of its stature and might be taken to mean there are other "Baha'i Faiths.'...
The Universal House of Justice, National Baha'i Review, January 1968

SUGGESTED READINGS
[12.25]

The Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah

The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 72-77

Baha'i Administration, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 10-11, 102-3, 125-26

Citadel of Faith, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 30-38

Messages to America: 1932-1946, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 2, 15-16

The Promised Day Is Come, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 124-29

The World Order of Baha'u'llah, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 64-67, 199

Compilation on Prominent People, issued by the Research Department at the Baha'i World Center

Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986, pp. 162-66

Sept. 19, 1994 Memorandum on External Affairs Strategy from the Universal House of Justice, published in The American Baha'i on April 9, 1994

The Promise of World Peace, a statement prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1982

Ridvan letters from the Universal House of Justice, 1979-1989

Ridvan letter from the Universal House of Justice, 1996, par. 11-14, 34

Wellspring of Guidance, Universal House of Justice Messages:1963-1968, pp. 131-36

National Spiritual Assembly Annual Reports, sections on External Affairs

Principles of Baha'i Administration, a compilation by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, 1973, pp. 24, 29-33

World Order Magazine, published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

One Country, newsletter published quarterly by the Office of Public Information of the Baha'i International Community, United Nations

The Prosperity of Humankind, Baha'i International Community

Political Non-involvement and Obedience to Government, A Compilation, Peter Khan

Turning Point for all Nations, 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, Baha'i International Community

APPENDIX A
THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY'S SECRETARIAT FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

OFFICE DESCRIPTIONS

[12.26] The Secretary for External Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly directs the work of the external affairs offices. There are four branch offices located in three cities: the Office of the Secretary is in Washington, D.C.; the U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office is located at the Baha'i National Center in Evanston, Illinois; and the Offices of Public Information and of the U.S. United Nations Representative are located in New York City.

Office of the Secretary for External Affairs
National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States
Office of the Secretary for External Affairs
1320 19th Street, NW, Suite 701
Washington, D.C. 20036
Telephone: (202) 833-8990

The Office of the Secretary coordinates the interaction of the U.S. Baha'i community with federal and state governments, leaders of thought, national and international non-governmental organizations and national media. The Office of the Secretary implements the policies and carries out the decisions of the National Assembly regarding external affairs; it also educates the U.S. Baha'i community and responds to its inquiries and suggestions. The office is also responsible for the external affairs training of the Baha'is of the U.S.

The National Assembly's diplomatic work with the federal government includes the defense of the Baha'is in Iran and other Muslim countries. The Office of the Secretary's efforts on behalf of the Baha'is in Iran have resulted in several congressional resolutions which condemn the continued persecution of the Baha'is in Iran.

The National Assembly also supports ratification of United Nations human rights treaties, which include Conventions on genocide, torture, the rights of the child, race discrimination and women. Collaborating with other non-governmental organizations such as the American Bar Association, Amnesty International, B'nai B'rith Women, International Human Rights Law Group, Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs and others, the Baha'is work with Congress, the White House, the State Department and other executive departments to promote ratification, implementation and compliance

with the U.N. treaties. The staff of the National Assembly works with several national [12.27] non-governmental organizations and networks on issues of interest and concern to the Baha'is: e.g. human rights, elimination of racism, status of women, the environment and sustainable development. The Baha'is have joined with other non-governmental organizations to participate in the recent U.N. conferences and summits on environment and development, human rights, social development, women and human settlements and to pursue activities related to those themes after the conferences have been held.

The National Assembly also calls experts who are Baha'is to assist it with support and representation in various activities.

U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office
The U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office
Baha'i National Center
1233 Central Street
Evanston, IL 60201
Telephone: (847)733-3523
Fax (847)733-3545
Email: USBRO@USBNC.ORG

The U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office (USBRO) administers the Baha'i refugee program by working closely with U.S. Government and non-governmental agencies to facilitate the resettlement of U.S.bound Baha'i refugees. The office also works with Baha'i agencies in countries where Baha'i refugees await resettlement to the United States and funds potential sponsors for refugees who need them. Newly arrived Baha'i refugees, most of whom are from Iran and Southeast Asia, are integrated into American society through the Local Spiritual Assemblies nationwide, and by individual Baha'i volunteers. The office is often called upon to assist Iranian Baha'is in cases of asylum and humanitarian parole.

The goal of the Baha'i Refugee Office is to integrate newly arrived Baha'i refugees into U.S. society and culture. The office accomplishes this by introducing the new arrivals to the local Baha'i communities; providing welcome packets to refugees in various languages; and educating local Baha'i communities by conducting workshops and distributing materials.

The U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office is responsible for teaching and consolidating all the Southeast Asian Baha'is. It arranges for the translation of Baha'i printed and audio/visual materials into various Southeast Asian languages for production and distribution. The office has also developed a large network of individual Baha'is who help integrate Southeast Asian immigrants into their new Baha'i communities. The office produces the quarterly Southeast Asian Helpers Bulletin in order to share teaching success stories and other important information with its Southeast Asian helpers.

[12.28] The U.S. Baha'i Refugee Office represents the National Spiritual Assembly in local, state and national organizations related to immigrant and refugee issues by attending the meetings and in many cases making presentations to the various organizations. It brings the many cases of persecution of the

Iranian Baha'is to the attention of both the local and state government and non-government organizations.

United Nations Office
Representative to the United Nations
Baha'i of the United States
866 United Nations Plaza Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1822
Telephone: (212) 803-2500
Fax (212) 803-2573
USUN-NYC@BIC.ORG

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, along with more than 170 other National Spiritual Assemblies, is represented at the United Nations by the Baha'i International Community (BIC), which holds consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In this role, it has the right to make written and oral statements to UN bodies.

Unlike other National Spiritual Assemblies, the U.S. National Assembly has its own representative at the United Nations. Since 1947, when the UN first gave consultative status to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly has appointed representatives to the organization.

The U.S. National Spiritual Assembly is an NGO observer at the United Nations, accredited to its Department of Public Information. The U.S. Baha'i Representative to the UN also has special status with United States affiliates of such UN bodies as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Women (UNIFEM). As an observer, the Representative may attend open meetings of the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and other United Nations organs, departments, and specialized agencies as well as attend special conferences called by the UN which are open to NGO participation.

The staff of the United Nations Office works with other U.S. non-governmental organizations at the UN in areas of mutual concern such as the promotion of human rights and the advancement of women; informs the Baha'i community and relevant agencies and offices of the National Spiritual Assembly about UN related issues and the work of the Baha'i International Community; and encourages American Baha'is to participate in UN activities at various levels. The Representative and his assistant attend weekly briefings on UN activities given by the UN Department of Public Information and is invited to briefings at the U.S. Mission, to special [12.29] meetings with diplomats, and to other affairs involving NGOs and the United States Government.

The Representative reports to the Secretariat for External Affairs and collaborates closely with its staff in Washington, D.C. in promoting the programs of the National Assembly.

The National Spiritual Assembly is a member of the Council of Organizations of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA).

Office of Public Information

Office of Public Information
Baha'is of the United States
866 United Nations Plaza Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1822
Telephone: (212) 803-2500
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Email: USOPI-NY@BIC.ORG

The Office of Public Information (OPI) produces and distributes public information materials and educates the American Baha'i Community about fostering relations with communications media. It ensures the accuracy of information released by the National Spiritual Assembly to the U.S. press and coordinates contact with national and regional media. It collects and classifies data on local and national newspaper references to the Faith and distributes news through the Baha'i Public Information Network.

The primary function of the Office of Public Information is to inform the public about the Baha'i Faith. OPI carries out this function through the hundreds of public information representatives and committees which comprise the Network. News and background material about the Baha'i Faith and its principles in action, about developments affecting the Baha'is, about the structure, teachings and scope of the Faith are disseminated to the public through the Network.

The Network is also the means through which the National Assembly is kept informed about references to the Faith in various local communications media. Public Information Representatives and committees submit newspaper articles in which the Faith is mentioned and they inform the Office of Public Information when remarks and reports about the Faith are made on radio and television.

13„SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

[13.1] Mandate for Social and Economic Development Projects
The soul-stirring events in Baha'u'llah's native land and the concomitant advance into the theater of world affairs of the agencies of His Administrative Order have combined to bring into focus new possibilities in the evolution of the Baha'i world community. Our Ridvan message this year captured these implications in its reference to the opening before us of a wider horizon in whose light can dimly be discerned new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must soon embark. These portend our greater involvement in the development of the social and economic life of peoples.

From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Baha'u'llah urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life.

In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the "progress of the world" and the "development of nations" as being among the ordinances of God for this day.

The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth.

The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the spiritual center of every Baha'i community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind.

Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Baha'i institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith.

The beloved [13.2] Master, through His illuminating words and deeds, set the example for the application of this concept to the reconstruction of society.

Witness, for instance, what social and economic progress the Iranian believers attained under His loving guidance and, subsequently, with the unfailing encouragement of the Guardian of the Cause.

Now, after all the years of constant teaching activity, the Community of The Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the processes of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits; particularly is action compelled by the expansion of the Faith in Third World countries where the vast majority of its adherents reside. The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Baha'i Community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honor, so desired by Baha'u'llah. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.

Establishment of the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center

It is indeed propitious that systematic attention be given to this vital sphere of Baha'i endeavor. We are happy, therefore, to announce the establishment at the World Center of the Office of Social and Economic Development, which is to assist the Universal House of Justice to promote and coordinate the activities of the friends throughout the world in this new field.

The International Teaching Center and, through it, the Continental Boards of Counselors are poised for the special responsibilities which devolve upon them to be alert to possibilities for extending the development of social and economic life both within and outside the Baha'i Community, and to advise and encourage the Assemblies and friends in their strivings.

We call now upon National Spiritual Assemblies to consider the implications of this emerging trend for their respective communities, and to take

well-conceived measures to involve the thought and actions of Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals in the devising and implementing of plans, within the constraints of existing circumstances and available resources. Progress in the development field will largely depend on natural stirrings at the grassroots, and it should receive its driving force from those sources rather than from an imposition of plans and programs from the top. The major [13.3] task of National Assemblies, therefore, is to increase the local communities" awareness of needs and possibilities, and to guide and coordinate the efforts resulting from such awareness. Already in many areas the friends are witnessing the confirmations of their initiatives in such pursuits as the founding of tutorial and other schools, the promotion of literacy, the launching of rural development programs, the inception of educational radio stations, and the operation of agricultural and medical projects. As they enlarge the scope of their endeavors other modes of development will undoubtedly emerge.

This challenge evokes the resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness of the many communities composing the Baha'i world. Different communities will, of course, perceive different approaches and different solutions to similar needs. Some can offer assistance abroad, while, at the outset, others must of necessity receive assistance; but all, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure; all can share; all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to upraising the quality of human life. The key to success is unity in spirit and in action.

Wholehearted Involvement Will Ensure a Deeper Consolidation of the Community
We go forward confident that the wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels. Our engagement in the technical aspects of development should, however, not be allowed to supplant the essentials of teaching, which remains the primary duty of every follower of Baha'u'llah. Rather should our increased activities in the development field be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action. For, if expansion of the teaching work does not continue, there can be no hope of success for this enlarged dimension of the consolidation process.

Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly-enrolled. Let them step forth to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Baha'i principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man.

May all derive enduring inspiration from the following statement written in 1933 by the hand of our beloved Guardian:

The problems which confront the believers at the present time, [13.4] whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative will be gradually solved as the number and the resources of the friends multiply and their capacity for service

and for the application of Baha'i principles develops. They should be patient, confident and active in utilizing every possible opportunity that presents itself within the limits now necessarily imposed upon them. May the Almighty aid them to fulfill their highest hopes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 20, 1983, to the Baha'is of the World

The upsurge of zeal throughout the Baha'i world for exploration of the new dimension of social and economic development is both heartwarming and uplifting to all our hopes. This energy within the community, carefully and wisely directed, will undoubtedly bring about a new era of consolidation and expansion, which in turn will attract further widespread attention, so that both aspects of change in the Baha'i world community will be interactive and mutually propelling.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1984, to the Baha'is of the World

Two Fundamental Principles
There are two principles which the House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of such projects of social and economic development, although, of course, there will be exceptions. The first is that they must be built on a substructure of existing, sufficiently strong local Baha'i communities. The second is that the long-term conduct of the project should aim at self-sufficiency and not be dependent upon continuing financial support from outside.

Natural Stage of Growth of Community
The first principle implies that the projects of social and economic development now to be undertaken are a natural stage of the growth of the Baha'i community and are needed by the community itself although they will, of course, benefit a much wider segment of society. The Baha'i world is in no position financially, or from the point of view of manpower, to launch undertakings for the economic and social development of populations in areas where there are but few believers. The greatest need of all peoples is for the Faith itself, so that they may know the destiny towards which they as individuals and as members of society must strive, and will learn from the teachings those virtues and methods which will enable them to work together in harmony, forbearance and trustworthiness.

A symbol of this process may be seen in the House of Worship [13.5] and its dependencies. The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those "institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant," are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Baha'i community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, for even the first local center that a Baha'i community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative center

and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life. The principle remains, however, that the spiritual precedes the material. First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community. Such stirrings can be fostered, encouraged and assisted by the national and continental institutions of the Faith, but without them any activities introduced from above might well prove abortive.

Self-Sufficiency

...Any project started by the Cause should be designed to grow soundly and steadily, and not to collapse from attrition. In other words, external assistance and funds, Baha'i and non-Baha'i, may be used for capital acquisitions, to make surveys, to initiate activities, to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and to develop on the strength of local Baha'i labor, funds and enthusiasm even if all external aid should be cut off.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 8, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Getting to Know the Local Community

The purpose of getting to know the community is to understand the network of people and institutions that make up its social fabric. By "community" is meant the city, neighborhood, town, county or rural area in which social and economic development is to take place. The Local Spiritual Assembly must carefully target an area based on the number of residents, the conditions of the area, and the human and financial resources of the Baha'i community. Energy and resources can be dissipated with little or no effect by choosing too large an area or one with too many residents. In a major urban area, a neighborhood or even a few square blocks might be appropriate.

[13.6] The Local Spiritual Assembly may want to choose several areas for study and later make a final selection.

Census Data

One source of information on a given area is census data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Every decade, in years ending with "0" (1980, 1990, 2000), the Bureau collects data on all citizens of the United States, including information on age, sex, race, national origin, language, marital status, family size, income level, and many other characteristics. The data is available two to three years after the census and is updated every few years until the next census. In large urban areas, the data may be broken down in a few square blocks (census tracts), or by larger units in less populous areas. Census data is available from local units of government, libraries, area planning commissions, chambers of commerce, and social service and economic development organizations. Census data is useful as a quick overview of an area's population, but, as are all statistics, is an abstraction and is not a complete picture.

Area Maps
Detailed area maps are another useful planning tool. While driving through the area, the planner notes on the map the location of factories, retail stores, shopping malls, offices, cultural institutions (libraries, museums, etc.), schools, hospitals, recreational facilities (parks, YMCA's, etc.), social service agencies, police and fire stations, churches and synagogues, and residential areas. The purpose is to see where residents live, work, shop, play, pray, go to school, and get needed services,,to find the institutions around which the community is built.

Area Studies
In some areas, a planning commission or local organization may have already published an area study. Efforts should be made to obtain such studies, but they should be read with a critical eye. Some Local Spiritual Assemblies may have a feel for the identified "community" and may choose not to use census data, maps, and studies. The planning process is flexible and adaptable. The Local Assembly can obtain additional information about an area through interviews and conversations with a cross-section of the Baha'is, local officials, leaders of thought, social service agencies, community organizations, economic development groups, chambers of commerce, and local residents.

Primary Objective:
Service to the Community
Projects should be consistent with the aims and purposes of the local and national civil authorities. Care must be taken to ensure, as far as possible, that the projects will be well-received and given warm support by the non-Baha'i community. Service to the community must be the prime objective for selecting projects and this should be made clear to the local inhabitants.

[13.7] Projects should be seen as means of rendering assistance and help. Through them, the participants should be able to gain in experience and confidence; in self respect and dignity. The concept of self-help should be a strong component in such projects.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

While it is the wish of the House of Justice to see social and economic development become a part of the life of Baha'i communities, great care should be exercised that our limited efforts are directed to projects whose primary objective is not business but service to the community. Such projects as engagement in commercial activities and the erection of factories will surely divert the attention of Baha'i institutions from directly promoting the Cause at this time. The Counselors will be able to advise and guide you in selecting, if favorable conditions exist, modest projects which promote the welfare of members of the Baha'i community, as well as the betterment of their fellow men.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, December 8, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic

Development'

Should Originate from Grass Roots
Projects should be attempted or undertaken only where a relatively strong and united community of Baha'is exists and preferably where a potential for growth is evident, and where such a potential is most likely to be enhanced by collective participation in a development project.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

A project should be considered for a community which has the will and desire to host a project and where there is reason to believe that members are committed to participate and support it in all stages of its implementation. It is essential that Baha'i development projects grow from the grass roots, and not be imposed from the top. It is important to educate the friends of a community in the merits of a development project and deepen their understanding and appreciation of its implications.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The message of the House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 has clearly set out the concepts, defined the objectives and [13.8] outlined the guiding principles for the selection and implementation of Baha'i development projects, programs or activities. The vast majority of Baha'i projects will be primarily generated at the grass roots, and, initially as required, will receive help from Baha'i sources, in terms of finances and manpower. The projects will, as you have surmised, be non-profit making, concerned mainly with activities closely related to education, health and hygiene, agriculture and simple community development activities. It is hoped that all these types of projects will reflect the strength of the spiritual principles enshrined in the Teachings of Baha'u'llah.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, December 22, 1983, to an individual, in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development"

Suggestions for projects for development are welcome from whatever source they spring but ideally they should emanate from the local communities and receive support of the Local and National Assemblies; it should not be necessary to send people to countries to solicit projects. However, if a community has the desire to plan a special project, it is free to call upon people with experience to assist in the planning, design and implementation of the scheme.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 1, 1983,
to the International Teaching Center,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development"

Different Communities Will Have Different Approaches
The House of Justice wishes us to stress that the nature and extent of the believers" involvement in social and economic development must vary from

country to country, both in relation to the general conditions of that country and in relation to the stage of development of the Baha'i community. It is only because a number of Baha'i communities have sufficiently increased their membership numerically, and have developed strongly functioning Baha'i administrative institutions that the House of Justice has been able to contemplate the launching of this new stage in the work of the Cause.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 30, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development"

Advisable to Start with Modest Projects
It is important that our undertakings be modest in their scope at the present time. Then, as we gain in confidence and experience and as our resources increase, our work will encompass expanded [13.9] objectives, and the friends will explore new areas of social and economic activity.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 22, 1983, to an individual, in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Projects of economic and social development undertaken by Baha'i institutions, or assisted by them, should usually be quite modest at first, so that experience can be gained. They should be suited to the local situation and meet the particular needs and aspirations of the local believers. Gradually, as knowledge and experience are gained, each National Spiritual Assembly can encourage and develop larger projects and perhaps include even the whole national community in appropriate endeavors.
The Universal House of Justice, dated May 7, 1984, to an individual, in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Great care should be taken to ensure that the number of people to be served corresponds to the resources and capacity of the Baha'i community; that Baha'i standards and values are applied at all stages so that no conflict may arise; and, most importantly, that the cultural and social setting in which the project is to be implemented is understood and incorporated into the plans.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice, dated December 13, 1983, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

Involvement in social and economic development endeavors should come as a result of the organic development of the Baha'i community as it progresses from strength to strength. Well-established, actively functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies may wish to consult about possibilities for applying the life-giving principles of the Faith to perceived needs in the community, preferably within and often primarily affecting the Baha'i community. Based on adequate planning, and with the unified support of the Baha'i community, the Assembly may then wish to initiate a modest activity which can be implemented and managed by the local Baha'is.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 15, 1988, to an individual Baha'i community

It is important to set modest, measurable and achievable goals. A poorly stated goal is: "To help the community learn to read." A more appropriate goal is: "To hold adult literacy classes to help thirty members of the community reach an eighth grade reading level." Vaguely defined goals may result in ill-defined projects which [13.10] raise false expectations in the Baha'i community and the community at large.

When designing a project, the Local Spiritual Assembly should consult with those people who will be the beneficiaries of the project. Those in need best understand what they need and how they can best take advantage of a project. A social and economic development project should emerge from the grass roots and be suited to the capacity, culture, and circumstances of the participants.

The appointment of a manager or project director is often a crucial element in the success of a social and economic development project. It is neither feasible nor practical for the Local Spiritual Assembly to manage the day-to-day operations of a large-scale project. In some cases, the Assembly may wish to appoint co-directors. It is not advisable to have more than two directors, however, as this tends to weaken lines of authority and accountability.

The responsibilities of the director and his or her relationship with the Assembly must be clearly delineated. The Assembly should give the director a position description which spells out duties and responsibilities. The degree of authority of the director over different functions of the project must also be made clear.

The next critical element is the recruitment, orientation, training, appreciation, evaluation, and supervision of the volunteers who "staff" the project. Space where the project will take place must be secured and a budget developed to ensure that adequate funds will be available for the project. Finally, the Assembly should consider media coverage of the project: whether the press and other media will be used to recruit participants and to publicize the results.

Assess Needs and Capabilities

Projects should be suited to the local needs and the resources at hand. They should be directed toward meeting the immediate and perceived needs of the community. Usually they should not be based upon the introduction of ideas or technologies that are not of immediate relevance to the needs and capacities of the people they are intended to serve....

Great care should be taken to ensure that the number of people to be served corresponds to the resources and capacity of the Baha'i community; that Baha'i standards and values are applied at all stages so that no conflict may arise; and, most importantly, that the cultural and social setting in which the project is to be implemented is understood and incorporated into the plans.

Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice, dated December 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[13.11] Project Design
The accepted Baha'i concept revolves around the need of the Baha'i community to understand how development fits into their Baha'i lives, and how they are at once the objective, the beneficiary and the agents for development. In most projects the local believers should be the ones to identify their own needs, make plans for meeting those needs, implement the plans and reap the benefits of their efforts. However, projects will have many variables, and non-local assistance in the form of funds, personnel and specialized knowledge, may be required. What is essential to each development effort is that each local group must participate according to its abilities and resources.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 13, 1985, to the International Teaching Center,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Some guidelines have been drawn up by the newly-established Office for Social and Economic Development at the World Center, and these are attached for your guidance....

1. Whatever goals and plans are adopted should preferably be the result of consultation of all those involved. The volunteer should not feel that he/she alone makes such decisions.

2. In each zone, where a development project is envisaged, a Local Spiritual Assembly should be selected. This Assembly could consult with its community to determine priorities. It is also advisable for the National Assembly to hold a conference in such a zone to consult with the friends concerning their needs, thus establishing their relative importance.

3. The Baha'i villages should be called upon to commit themselves to the implementation of the project. Therefore manpower requirements and needs should be clearly identified.

4. It is not always necessary to have an expatriate specialist to oversee a project. A search should be made for qualified believers, either locally or in another part of [the country].

5. In any discussion of the project, attention should be paid to the following aspects:

a. Is it feasible?
b. Are the objectives and aims clear?
c. Who will manage or act as leader of the project? Is he/she a trustworthy, reliable Baha'i?
d. Does the local community have the will and desire to host the proposed project?
e. Do the local believers want to participate? If so, the extent [13.12] of their participation and involvement must be determined. For example, what will be the contribution of the local believers in labor, materials, facilities, accommodation for specialist help (if any), etc.?
f. What will be the contribution of the National Assembly in labor, materials,

funds, etc., as well as in monitoring the progress of the project?
g. Has thought been given to the prominent role Baha'i women can play?
h. Are Baha'i youth involved?
i. Is the project likely to affect the non-Baha'i community? If so, how will they be advised? How will their cooperation be sought and secured?
j. How is the project likely to be viewed by Government authorities?
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 19, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Further systematic attention needs to be given to the eventual elimination of illiteracy from the Baha'i community, an accomplishment which would, beyond anything else, make the Holy Word accessible to all the friends and thus reinforce their efforts to live the Baha'i life. Similarly, assisting in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community must assume more importance in Baha'i activities.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Ridvan, 1989, to the Baha'is of the World

Project Implementation
Several precautions should be taken in the implementation of a major social and economic development project. First, permission of the local authorities must be secured. In some cases, there are laws and ordinances which regulate certain activities and others which require special permits.

Second, although a given social and economic development project may seem worthwhile, it may encounter community opposition. Residents in some communities have strongly objected to the opening of food pantries, shelters, or even tutoring programs in their area because they felt these projects were detrimental to the neighborhood.

A third precaution revolves around competition. Other religious organizations, community groups and social service agencies may be operating similar projects. These groups are competing for scarce resources, visibility within the community and media attention and [13.13] may resent or even oppose similar activities by the Baha'is. Consultation with these groups can prevent problems. It may, in some cases, be best to support already established efforts of another organization if the resources of the Baha'i community are insufficient for a self-sustaining project.

Managers
Trustworthy people who have an acceptable degree of managerial skill should be identified and if necessary given additional training to become better able to coordinate available human and material resources with care and understanding. The degree of skill required should correspond to the size and magnitude of a project.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center,
approved by the Universal House of Justice, dated December 13, 1983,
to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States

Collaboration with Other Organizations
It may also be possible for the Baha'i community to collaborate with a non-Baha'i organization, which may have similar interests and whose objectives do not conflict with those of the Faith, to promote a worthwhile social program.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 15, 1988, to a local Baha'i community

It is also worth remembering that projects may need amendment to or alteration of their objectives as operational experience may show. The need for such changes can only be realized if constant monitoring is carried out and is accepted as a component part of the project.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice, dated December 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Evaluation of Projects
If measurable goals have been established during the planning process, the outcome can easily be measured. The project did tutor twenty children or it did not, delivered 200 food baskets or did not, etc. However, the "numbers" tell only part of the story.

The director, volunteers, participants and community residents should be asked to evaluate the project either in writing or through interviews. Some key questions are:
´ Why did the project succeed or fail?
´ How could the same or a similar project be improved?
´ Did the project operate in accordance with Baha'i principles and was it "conducive to human honor and dignity'?
´ What did the Assembly, the director, the volunteers, the Baha'i community and the participants learn and gain from the experience?
´ [13.14] Did the project emerge from the grass roots and address the "immediate and perceived needs of the community'?

FINANCING OF PROJECTS

Generally, projects will come under one of the following categories.

1. Self-Financed
When the resources of the community are adequate to meet all expenses connected with the implementation of the project. In some cases it may be feasible for a group to form themselves into a cooperative for the purpose of financing a project. All cooperative arrangements must be clearly ascertained and proper agreements should be drawn indicating each party's responsibility. These steps should occur, preferably, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly or an agency designated by the National Assembly. Emphasis should be placed on sound business practices, honest contractual agreements and firm commitments.

2. National Fund-Financed
When the project is of national character, and comes directly under the

auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly should study the project finances and carefully consider the implications of its commitment, taking into consideration: duration, possible expansion, available personnel, materials, and all other factors necessary to carry the project to a successful conclusion; or to continue indefinitely without becoming a drain on the National resources.

3. Shared Finance
When a development project may be of special value to the community, but its financial resources are limited, the National Spiritual Assembly may, in consultation with the Counselors, determine the extent of supplemental financial assistance needed and submit this to the Universal House of Justice.

The Universal House of Justice will consider such development projects referred to it by National Spiritual Assemblies, will determine how implementation may be carried out and will advise the National Assembly of its views and give the necessary directions.

[13.15] In some instances it may be the wish of the Universal House of Justice to invite non-Baha'i development agencies to participate in the financing or implementation of a project. For the time being, this action will be taken only with the approval of the World Center and referred to agencies developed for this purpose.

The Teachings of our Faith are the mightiest and most powerful instrument created for the advancement of human society. We are now called upon to participate, as and when circumstances permit, collectively, in promoting social and economic aspects of human development and thereby placing the World Baha'i community in the forefront of the progressive movements of the World.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center, approved by the Universal House of Justice, dated December 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Financial Support from Non-Baha'is
Your letter...about accepting donations from non-Baha'is for the maintenance of tutorial schools has been received, and we have been asked to reply as follows.

"Baha'is may receive contributions from non-Baha'is for charitable activities whose beneficiaries are non-Baha'is as well. However, it is very important to ensure that the acceptance of funds from any source should in no way affect the school's direction and policy."
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 13, 1978, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Individual Ventures
Baha'is who wish to start a business as a group effort in the service of the Faith are advised to consult with their Local or National Spiritual Assemblies.
The Universal House of Justice, dated May 7, 1984, to an individual, in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development"

If Baha'is in any area wish to join together in forming a school as a business

venture, they are, of course, free to do so. Such a venture may well be of benefit to the community and to the Cause, but it must be regarded entirely as a private commercial undertaking....
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 8, 1984, to the International Teaching Center,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development"

In regard to the kindergarten which belongs to a Baha'i pioneer family, it could be considered as a private social and economic activity and would be listed as such, although it is clearly recognized [13.16] that the Baha'i community does not have any responsibility for the management or operation of such a school.

The individual initiative of the friends should be carefully nurtured and encouraged so that they may, guided by the spiritual principles of our Faith, arise to fulfill their spiritual responsibilities.
Letter written by the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 16, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is the view of the House of Justice that you should carefully study all aspects of such a meritorious undertaking [an agricultural project in Senegal], and then embark upon it. As you are known to be a Baha'i and plan to utilize the facilities of the proposed property for the benefit of the Faith, it is important that the fruit of your labors should ultimately serve to consolidate the foundation of the community and redound to its good name.

As to the ownership and operation of the project, the House of Justice feels that, at this stage, it should be regarded as a personal venture, and should not be run by the National Spiritual Assembly. However, this does not mean that you may not seek, as you have sought, the advice and counsel of the National Assembly in any of its aspects when you feel that such consultation would be beneficial.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 22, 1984, to the International Teaching Center,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Role of Women and Youth
Conscious and sincere effort must be made to ensure women's participation. Some projects may be entirely directed to the upliftment of the women; and in those projects, the participation and support of men must be assured.

The role of youth in development must receive the careful attention of the National Spiritual Assemblies, so that this valuable source of idealism and energy may be directed to the service of mankind.
Letter from the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Center,
approved by the House of Justice, dated December 13, 1983,
to a National Spiritual Assembly

POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Information and Referral

Most cities or counties in the United States have a United Way Crusade or Community Chest which publishes a directory of agencies and programs addressing social and economic concerns. Such a directory can be a valuable tool in referring the friends and others from the community to appropriate agencies or assistance with specific needs. This information can be supplemented with additional [13.17] private sources of various forms of assistance which may come to the attention of the friends in setting up an Information and Referral Service. Names of private sources of assistance should be held in confidence by volunteers operating the I & R Service and should be contacted in a judicious manner to avoid misuse and overuse of any source.

Volunteerism

Many Baha'is already volunteer in social and economic development programs. The Assembly can appoint these volunteers, if they so wish, as their official representatives, thus making it an activity of the local community. In most cities, there are interfaith councils which would welcome Baha'i representation in serving the social needs of their communities.

Food

Food Baskets

Many churches distribute food baskets to the needy during their holiday season. The Baha'is can help with such projects and can observe Ayyam-i-Ha or various Baha'i Holy Days in a similar manner.

Food Pantries

An Assembly with a Baha'i Center or other space available can maintain an ongoing food pantry. Food is available through community food drives, the Federal Commodities program, and local merchants.

Congregate Meals

If space and cooking facilities are available, the Assembly can serve hot meals on a regular basis to the needy or a meal in observance of a Baha'i Holy Day.

(See also Chapter 9, Section entitled "Observing the Holy Days")

Nutrition

The Assembly can hold classes on budgeting, shopping, cooking nutritious meals, and canning.

Community Gardening

Many cities allow groups to grow vegetables on vacant lots or unused city property.

Housing

Possible projects related to housing:

´ Workshops on simple home repair
´ A tool loan program
´ Assisting the elderly and others with painting, decorating and home repair (in the spirit of a community "barn-raising")
´ Organizing block clubs
´ Organizing tenants" associations

Shelter for the Homeless
Shelters can be expensive to operate, may encounter community or political opposition, and are subject to laws and regulations. However, [13.18] a Local Spiritual Assembly with a Center or other space might want to investigate the possibility of starting a small shelter. Day programs with planned activities are one way by which a Local Spiritual Assembly can serve the homeless. Another way is for the Baha'i community to voluntarily staff an existing shelter one night a week.

Education English as a Second Language (ESL)
With the influx of Baha'i refugees from Iran and Southeast Asia and the increased enrollment of Hispanics and other language groups, the Assembly may be able to arrange through a local community college to hold ESL classes at its Center or other facility. These classes are offered at little or no cost and the teacher comes to the site where the class is held.

Literacy
One out of every five adult Americans is functionally illiterate, meaning that they cannot read newspapers or recipes or fill out job applications. There may be literacy councils and community colleges in your area which will send literacy teachers to classes organized by the Baha'is.

Tutoring
There is a need for remedial tutoring from the elementary level through the college level. Baha'is who are professional teachers can teach others to tutor. Also, there are some community organizations that provide training for persons interested in tutoring.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Women, A Compilation, Excerpts form Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1986

The Evolution of Institutional Capacity for Social and Economic Development, prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development, August 28, 1994 (available from the Office of the Treasurer)

The Turning Point of All Nations, prepared by International Community, United Nations Office, N. Y., October, 1995 (available from the Baha'i Distribution Service)

APPENDIX A
THE DIRECTION OF BAHA'I SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

[13.19] The following document entitled "Baha'i Social and Economic Development Prospects for the Future," dated September 16, 1993, was approved by the Universal House of Justice for use in orienting and guiding the work of Baha'i Social and Economic Development throughout the world:

In its message of 20 October 1983 to the Baha'i world, the Universal House of Justice called for the incorporation of social and economic development

processes into the regular pursuits of the community of the Greatest Name. During the past ten years, many communities have responded to this call and a considerable number of projects,„mostly in education but also several in health, agriculture and community development,„are now being actively pursued. A few of these projects have achieved the stature of development of organizations with reasonably complex programmatic structures and significant spheres of influence. Beyond the successes of this collection of projects and organizations, however, the most valuable outcome of the devoted efforts of the believers in this field has been the accumulated knowledge on how to operationalize a distinctively Baha'i approach to social and economic development. The October 1983 message set out some of the most noteworthy elements of this approach, among which are the following:

1. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of Baha'u'llah's Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth.

2. The challenge of engaging in social and economic development evokes the resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness of the many communities composing the Baha'i world.

3. The first steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Baha'i community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct, and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

4. Progress in the development field will depend largely on natural stirrings at the grass roots, and should receive its driving [13.20] force from those sources rather than from the imposition of plans and programs from the top.

5. All, irrespective of circumstances or resources, are endowed with the capacity to respond in some measure to this challenge, for all can participate in the joint enterprise of applying more systematically the principles of the Faith to raising the quality of human life.

6. Activities in the development field should be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action.

7. The wholehearted involvement of the friends in these activities will ensure a deeper consolidation of the community at all levels.

8. The key to success is unity in spirit and action.

The experience gained during the past ten years is now sufficiently broad to allow the Baha'i community to systematically expand the number and range of its social and economic development activities in the years to come. In this respect, a number of ideas merit careful consideration.

1. Degrees of complexity
In general, social and economic development projects at the grass roots best begin with a relatively simple set of actions. The friends should be allowed to

gain experience from, and increase the range of, their activities naturally, without undue pressure from opinions that are often based solely on theoretical considerations. A tutorial school, for example, can in principle become a center for activities such as health education, family counseling and reforestation, but in most cases, it is advisable for it to start simply as a school focusing all its resources on the children it proposes to serve.

Insistence on initial simplicity of action at the local level does not, of course, contradict the inherent complexity of the development process itself. In fact, to raise local action to a reasonable level of effectiveness it is necessary to gradually develop corresponding structures in the micro-region, the region, and the nation itself capable of dealing with increasing degrees of theoretical and administrative complexity. Otherwise social and economic development runs the danger of being reduced to a set of laudable activities lacking the coherence and integration that are indispensable for consistent progress.

2. Capacity building

It has often been said that development is not a product to be [13.21] delivered by the "developed" to the "underdeveloped." Rather, it is a process the main protagonists of which have to be the people themselves. The greatest concern of Baha'i projects has to be the development of the friends" capacity to make decisions about their spiritual and material progress and then to implement them. In an ideal project, while concrete action is directed toward visible improvement of some aspect of life, success is measured by the impact these actions have on the capacity of the community and its institutions to address development issues at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness.

In this context, the relationship between development and delivery of services needs to be examined. For Baha'is, of course, service is a basic principle of human existence; every act, every personal or community project, is to be carried out in the spirit of service. It is impossible to imagine a Baha'i social and economic development project that does not operate on the principle of service. Nonetheless, the delivery of services should not be viewed as the main purpose of Baha'i development undertakings. Approaches to development centered on the donation of goods and services, so characteristic of traditional religious charity and the programs of the welfare state, are known to have debilitating effects and often lead to paralysis. In the villages of the world, the Baha'i community should become the spearhead of spiritual, social and economic transformation. A village does not develop merely because it receives simple services in primary health and sanitation, in primary education or in agricultural extension structured around credit and technological packages.

3. Learning

Central to the capacity of a Baha'i community to lead a process of transformation is the ability of its members and institutions to apply the Revelation of Baha'u'llah to various aspects of life and thereby establish

consistent patterns of change. In fact, learning to apply the Teachings to achieve progress could be taken as the very definition of Baha'i social and economic development. Such learning has to occur locally, regionally, nationally and internationally and become the axis around which our development efforts are organized at all levels.

Learning in this sense is not limited to study and evaluation. It comes about in combination with action. The believers must regularly engage in consultation, action, reflection„all in the light of the guidance inherent in the Teachings of the Faith. Such a learning process can occur in a very simple manner at the village and local level, but with greater sophistication by national agencies and institutions. At the international level, it calls for a higher degree of conceptualization, one that takes account of the broader processes [13.22] of global transformation as described in the Writings and serves to adjust the overall direction of development activities in each country accordingly.

4. Development of human resources

Learning and the building of capacity are closely linked to the development of human resources. That development ideas and projects are not imposed from above, and that institutions are to respond to aspirations and initiatives at the grass roots, are established characteristics of Baha'i development. However, the vigilant application of these principles does not imply that no initiative can be taken from the top. Proven and well-conceived programs and approaches to development can be promoted nationally or internationally, primarily through training. Training methods would, of course, have to foster participation and be carried out with a humble attitude toward learning. Otherwise, training tends to produce a cadre of individuals who are slaves to a given way of doing things.

Moreover, the need for development of human resources is not limited to the direct participants in the actual projects. Thousands of Baha'i youth in colleges and universities throughout the world, as well as an increasing number of professionals working in fields related to social and economic development, should be encouraged to participate in a worldwide learning process designed to grow in size and range. Indeed, Baha'i development projects may be seen as sites where training is provided for an increasing number of individuals from both materially poor and wealthy nations and from various sectors of society.

5. Influencing society

Irrespective of whether or not an individual who has benefited from a period of collaboration with a developed project finally becomes directly involved in such projects, the ability to apply the Teachings of Baha'u'llah to the affairs of society„learned in action„constitutes a valuable asset for his or her future efforts to serve and influence society. Development projects in themselves offer great opportunities to the friends to become involved in the life of society in ways that far transcend efforts to improve the lot of a few people. Openness to collaboration with people of capacity and leaders of thought concerned with issues of progress, and the willingness and ability to

invite them to participate in applying the Teachings to specific problems, have to be created at all levels, if we are to fully exploit this dimension of our development endeavors.

6. Integration

Certain lessons that have been learned in the larger society need [13.23] to be incorporated into Baha'i thinking about social and economic development. Paramount among these is the inescapable need for integration. Experience has shown that fragmented activities in various fields such as health, education, agriculture, or industrial development do not lead to sustainable development. The knowledge that should be brought to bear on development problems of the communities of the world does not fit in a single discipline. Effective development unequivocally calls for coordinated interdisciplinary and multi-sectorial action.

The idea of integral development may seen to contradict the principle enunciated above that grass roots action must begin simply and in a way that can be managed by the community itself. However, this apparent contradiction disappears if local action is seen as a means for building capacity. In this case it does not matter with which activity the development of a community actually begins; complexity will arise naturally in an organic way. What is to be avoided is that artificial fragmentation created by separate programs set in motion in a given population by professionals in specific disciplines, each ignoring the knowledge and experience of other groups, each competing for resources and for the constant attention of the people they are to serve.

For Baha'i programs integration poses an additional challenge. Within the Baha'i framework, material progress cannot be separated from spiritual development. Social and economic development endeavors have to be carried out in the more general context of the expansion and consolidation of the Faith. When this does not occur, when the various institutions that serve the local community are not well aware of each others" efforts and do not consult on the nature and the range of their activities, development projects become difficult to manage. Divorced form the basic processes of the expansion and consolidation of the Faith, Baha'i social and economic development cannot prosper and is prone to failure.

In our zeal to pursue social and economic development in the context of expansion and consolidation we should avoid a pitfall that leads to confusion and the dissipation of energy; impressed by the interconnectedness of all the factors that lead to community development, one may be tempted to define social and economic development as a synonym for the development of the Baha'i community. According to such a definition, all efforts to develop the community, including the establishment of the Nineteen Day Feast, the holding of classes for the spiritual education of children, and the strengthening of Local and National Assemblies and their agencies, would have to be regarded as social and economic development projects. Such a broad definition overlooks the fact that the growth of the Baha'i community is the result of a number of interacting processes, each directed by various institutions of the

Administrative Order and their agencies in collaboration with one another.

[13.24] Social and economic development is only one component and must play a particular role in the growth process.

B. THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The observations made in the previous section suggest the gradual establishment in each national community of channels through which institutions, agencies and organizations can serve the needs of the friends in their efforts to apply the Revelation of Baha'u'llah to achieve material progress for themselves and their people. What flows through these channels is primarily learning, although the extending of financial support and the offering of guidance to solve problems that arise naturally through community action are also important.

The Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) in Haifa assists the Universal House of Justice in the promotion and coordination of Baha'i social and economic development worldwide. The primary purpose of OSED is to facilitate learning about development by fostering and supporting action, reflection on action, study, consultation, the gathering and systematization of experience, conceptualization, and training„all carried out in the light of the Teachings of the Faith. Ensuring that material resources become increasingly available to Baha'i development efforts, coordinating the international flow of such resources and administering some of the funds intended for projects are also important functions of OSED.

Individuals and institutions frequently seek advice from OSED on how to design, implement and promote social and economic development projects. Based on the knowledge generated through the analysis of substantive reports and the documentation of systematic advances in the Baha'i experience of development, OSED is able to offer these individuals and institutions guidance and share with them the results of the learning occurring in the Baha'i community.

As projects grow in size and complexity, whether they are under the aegis of National Spiritual Assemblies or administered by Baha'i-inspired organizations enjoying the guidance and support of the institutions of the Faith, OSED's relationship with them often becomes more involved and demanding.

To interact effectively with major Baha'i programs and organizations, OSED invites individuals, experienced in the field of development, to collaborate with it, each in promoting the progress of one particular organization. In his or her role as a collaborator, such an individual assumes a number of responsibilities on behalf of OSED. Chief among these is to help the organization establish a clear vision of itself, its role and its purpose, a vision that will be [13.25] periodically reexamined, modified and restated in keeping with the progress of the Faith in the region. According to this evolving vision, well-defined strategies are to be devised and regularly adjusted. On the basis of these strategies, projects are created along diverse lines of action and appropriate proposals are developed and properly presented to various agencies, both within and outside the country, for financing or other assistance. The designated collaborator also assists in developing a

flexible organizational structure, one free of contradictions, with clear channels for decision-making, appropriate instruments for implementation, and adequate methods for evaluation. All of these tasks are, of course, to be carried out under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly and in consultation with the Counselors, whose vital roles in this respect have been set forth in the 20 October 1983 message from the Universal House of Justice.

It is hoped that by facilitating direct contact among its collaborators, OSED will be able to develop an informal network through which experiences can be shared and learning can occur in a natural way. The existence of such a network of individuals, a number of whom will have their own contacts with funding sources, will significantly broaden the basis for the interaction of the Baha'i community with donor agencies. These individuals will also help put university students and professionals interested in social and economic development in contact with Baha'i programs so that, over time, an increasing number of these programs and organizations offer training through internships of various durations.

In addition to offering collaborative support to major programs and organizations, it is expected that OSED will itself promote, on an international scale, certain approaches and methodologies to development that have proven to be effective. For example, during the past few years a highly effective approach to literacy has emerged. A worldwide campaign is envisioned in which, in country after country, a group of selected individuals are familiarized with the underlying concepts of the approach and are asked to adapt its methods and prepare materials for use in their own country. Subsequently, these same individuals can train others to act as facilitators of literacy classes, so that classes can be established in hundreds of localities throughout the country. Likewise, in primary health care, excellent experience has been gained in recent years. This experience can now be analyzed, the appropriate methods and materials can be defined, and again, in country after country, the training of health workers can be vigorously pursued.

C. MAJOR AREAS OF ACTION

The major areas of action OSED is to pursue in the coming years include education, literacy, primary health care, and sustainable [13.26] rural development. As mentioned above, literacy and primary health care are to be addressed by focusing on regional training campaigns. As for integral rural development, this is a field in which systematic Baha'i experience is scarce. However, there is a great deal of valuable experience outside the Faith, and with the help of certain Baha'i individuals who are known and accepted in the field, it is possible to gather the necessary knowledge, analyze it and make a beginning in this essential area of development. What is called for is not a complex development scheme but a path of action of increasing complexity that can lead to the establishment of programs of integral, sustainable development at the level of the micro-region.

There can be no doubt that education will continue to be the greatest concern of Baha'i social and economic development endeavors throughout the world in the

foreseeable future. Three interrelated areas„Baha'i schools, special programs for junior youth and moral education„merit special attention.

Experience has shown that there are at least three challenges Baha'i schools must face in various stages of their development. The first has to do with the functioning of the school„the organization of its physical space, the selection of an acceptable program, and the erection of a working academic and administrative structure. This has proven to be a formidable task for most schools and has required an inordinate amount of time and energy. With the experience gained over the past decade, however, it is now possible to develop a set of guidelines to help Baha'i schools, whether privately owned or belonging to the institutions, to meet this challenge with greater ease.

A second challenge is related to the process by which the Baha'i character of the school becomes manifest. This is usually addressed in terms of the atmosphere of the school, relationships among people and extra-curricular activities. An hour or two of courses, vaguely described as moral education, are also offered at this stage. It is interesting to note that even with small changes in a few components of the educational process, Baha'i schools become known for their standards of excellence and enjoy considerable esteem in the communities within which they operate.

A third challenge, scarcely addressed until now, concerns the development of Baha'i-inspired curricula. The approach to such a development has to be uniquely suited to the conditions and opportunities of the worldwide Baha'i community. It is unreasonable to expect that Baha'i education will be invented by a group of individuals immersed in academia, no matter how profound their knowledge of the Faith and of education. The gradual development of contents and methods of Baha'i education will most probably occur as the result of the diverse activities of an increasing number of educators working in varied cultural and ecological settings throughout [13.27] the world. Systematic research and high quality academic study are called for, not as isolated activities, but as components, albeit important ones, of a process in which the design of curricula is closely connected with educational practice and systematization of educational experience. The role of OSED in fostering such a process is crucial. Any effort to ignore it by introducing, for example, the concept of a universal core curriculum at too early a stage would be counterproductive.

Significant as Baha'i schools are, to concentrate all our energies on their development does not constitute a sound strategy. As the educational systems of the world collapse, the demands of educational establishments„beginning with villages, towns, and municipalities and soon reaching entire countries„for new content and for teacher training will rise dramatically. With the same effort that is spent to build and maintain one Baha'i school, hundreds of teachers belonging to official systems can be trained in how to include in their daily activities several educational elements inspired by the Faith. In two areas„namely, moral education and the preparation of youth and junior youth for future life„the opportunities for Baha'i influence are almost

unlimited.

14„PROPERTIES

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTIES

[14.1] The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar

O Concourse of creation! O people! Construct edifices in the most beautiful fashion possible, in every city, in every land, in the name of the Lord of Religions. Adorn them with that which beseemeth them. Then commemorate the Lord, the Merciful, the Clement, in spirit and fragrance.

Teach your children what hath been revealed through the Supreme Pen. Instruct them in what hath descended from the Heaven of greatness and power. Let them memorize the Tablets of the Merciful and chant them with melodious voices in galleries built in the Temple of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. The prayers of the Lord should be chanted in a manner to attract the hearts and souls. Blessed is he who listeneth unto the River of Life.
Baha'u'llah, quoted in Baha'i Year Book, 1925-1926, p. 59

Of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar can most adequately provide the essentials of Baha'i worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Baha'u'llah.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 186

Accessories
The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is one of the most vital institutions in the world, and it hath many subsidiary branches. Although it is a House of Worship, it is also connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a traveler's hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies. Every Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is connected with these five things. My hope is that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar will now be established in America, and that gradually the hospital, the [14.2] school, the university, the dispensary and the hospice, all functioning according to the most efficient and orderly procedures, will follow. Make these matters known to the beloved of the Lord, so that they will understand how very great is the importance of this "Dawning-Point of the Remembrance of God." The Temple is not only a place for worship; rather, in every respect it is complete and whole.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 99-100

Concerning the copy of a Tablet from Abdu'l-Baha which you had enclosed in your letter of October 20th and in which the Master defines the order in which Temple accessory buildings are to be constructed; this Tablet, Shoghi Effendi feels, should not be interpreted too rigidly as giving strictly the exact order in which these accessories are to be built. Nor should it be regarded as providing an exhaustive list of the buildings which will in future be erected around the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. The International House of

Justice will have to lay down definitely the number and order of these future Temple accessories, and to define their relationships to each other, and to the Temple itself....

As to the question of the relationship of an administrative building to the Temple; this also will have to be defined in future, but whatever the actual form which such relationship may assume, and whatever its details, it should be based on the general principle that these two sets of Baha'i institutions embody two vital and distinct, yet inseparable aspects of Baha'i life: worship and service. The central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which is exclusively devoted to purposes of worship, represents the spiritual element, and therefore fulfills a primary function in every Baha'i Community, whereas all other Temple accessories, whether of a strictly administrative, cultural or humanitarian character, are secondary, and come next in importance to the House of Worship itself.
Letter written of behalf of the Guardian,
dated January 28, 1939, to a National Spiritual Assembly

A symbol of this process [social and economic development] may be seen in the House of Worship and its dependencies. The first part is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those "institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to [14.3] the ignorant" are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Baha'i community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu'l-Adhkar....
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 8, 1984, in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

The Haziratu'l-Quds,„National and Local
The Haziratu'l-Quds is an institution of the Faith and no distinction should be made between a National or Local Haziratu'l-Quds concerning its use.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated, June 27, 1970, in Lights of Guidance, p. 271

Simultaneous with the establishment and incorporation of local and national Baha'i assemblies, with the formation of their respective committees, the formulation of national and local Baha'i constitutions and the founding of Baha'i endowments, undertakings of great institutional significance were initiated by these newly founded Assemblies, among which the institution of the Haziratu'l-Quds,„the seat of the Baha'i National Assembly and pivot of all Baha'i administrative activity in the future,„must rank as one of the most important....

Relationship with Mashriqu'l-Adhkar
Complementary in its functions to those of the Mashriqu'lAdhkar,„an edifice exclusively reserved for Baha'i worship,„this institution, whether local or

national, will, as its component parts, such as the Secretariat, the Treasury, the Archives, the Library, the Publishing Office, the Assembly Hall, the Council Chamber, the Pilgrims" Hostel, are brought together and made jointly to operate in one spot, be increasingly regarded as the focus of all Baha'i administrative activity, and symbolize, in a befitting manner, the ideal of service animating the Baha'i community in its relation alike to the Faith and to mankind in general.

From the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, ordained as a house of worship by Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the representatives of Baha'i communities, both local and national, together with the members of their respective committees, will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will enable them to discharge, in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Haziratu'l-Quds,„the scene of their administrative activities,„their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.
Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 339-40

[14.4] The Haziratu'l-Quds, although Feasts and Holy Days are celebrated in it, must not be confounded with a Temple; it is an administrative headquarters. No doubt in the future it will be used for purely administrative purposes, but for the time being it must fill the role of being a true Center and rallying point for the Baha'i community.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 15, 1947,
to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, 1994 ed., par. 913

The Baha'i Writings anticipate the formation of two distinct Baha'i institutions in every locality: the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and the Haziratu'l-Quds. It is important to understand the different roles of these two institutions. Until Baha'i communities reach the stage of development where they need and can maintain both a Mashriqu'lAdhkar and a Haziratu'l-Quds, however, one building is usually sufficient for most needs.

Local Baha'i Centers„Embryonic Haziratu'l-Quds
When a Local Spiritual Assembly acquires a Baha'i Center, it should regard this meeting place as an embryonic Haziratu'l-Quds and should do everything possible to foster in the community a proper attitude of respect for the Center....

When a community grows in size and in the resources at its disposal, the Assembly may well acquire a community center for recreational and other uses, in addition to the Baha'i Center. How-ever, if it is able to acquire only one center, that meeting place should be designated as the Baha'i Center since it is the focus of Baha'i community activity and the seat of the Spiritual Assembly, in addition to its being identified with the Baha'i Faith in the eyes of the public.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 26, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Dancing in a Baha'i Center")

As regards your question about the proper designation for the huts which will be used by the believers in villages, as Baha'i Centers, he thinks that, for the time being, until a more dignified structure can be erected, they should be called "Baha'i Center," and not Haziratu'l-Quds„the correct name is Haziratu'l-Quds and not Hazira.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 4, 1953, in Unfolding Destiny, p. 301

[14.5] For even the first local center that a Baha'i community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative center and gathering place of the community, but also as...the heart of other aspects of community life.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, May 8, 1984,
in "Extracts Concerning Baha'i Social and Economic Development'

Endowments
The acquisition of local endowments, which is given as a specific goal to some national communities, is intended to assist in the consolidation of local communities and to foster the spirit of unity and collaboration among the believers.

A local endowment can be quite a small piece of land; it can be purchased by the Local Spiritual Assembly or is more usually the gift of one or more of the believers.

If the Local Assembly is incorporated, the endowment should be registered in its name, but if it is not, the endowment can be held by one or more of the believers on behalf of the community.

For example, if one of the believers gives a small piece of land he can continue to hold it in his name, but it will be known that he does so on behalf of the Local Spiritual Assembly and that the land will in time be transferred legally to the Assembly when that is possible.

In some countries the land is owned by the state or the tribe and only the use of the land can be assigned; in such places the goal can be considered achieved if the Local Spiritual Assembly can obtain the use of a plot of land in its own name.

In some countries, even if the land can be purchased, government regulations require that within a specific time a building must be erected on land held by religious institutions.

This problem can be met in several ways: it may be possible for the Spiritual Assembly to obtain the use of, or acquire, a plot of land for agricultural purposes, thus avoiding the need to erect a building; or if the most practical course is to erect on the land a Baha'i institution such as a local Haziratu'l-Quds, the Assembly could, in its own records, demarcate a portion of the land to be the endowment, distinct from the portion on which the Haziratu'l-Quds stands.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated Naw-Ruz 1974 to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Endowments can be in the form of land, administrative buildings, schools, or other institutions. For further information on endowments, see God Passes By, pp. 337-39.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Contributions from Non-Baha'is'; Chapter 18, Section entitled "Baha'i Cemeteries")

FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ACQUIRING A CENTER

[14.6] The Local Spiritual Assembly must make provisions for a meeting place where the community can gather, committees can function, or classes can be held. If the Assembly finds it sufficient to meet in private homes or to rent facilities when necessary, it does not need a separate Baha'i Center.

Consider Alternatives
Before deciding to acquire a Baha'i Center, several alternatives should be considered:
´ Using private homes
´ Using a combination of private homes, rental office spaces, and public halls
´ Renting a facility

The decision to acquire a Baha'i Center should be based on the community's readiness for one, regardless of whether someone has offered to donate a building or whether sufficient funds to purchase a building are available.

Often it will be wisest for Spiritual Assemblies to rent facilities as needed for specific events. At a later stage of development, the Assembly will have acquired the experience to rent on a long-term basis or to acquire a facility of its own.

A Local Spiritual Assembly must clearly understand all aspects of owning property and be able to handle the extra financial, physical and administrative requirements. A Baha'i Center should not be seen as "a way to save money" or as an investment. The day-today operating costs of a facility can soon absorb any anticipated savings.

An Assembly may decide to begin saving funds for that time in the future when the community is ready for a Haziratu'l-Quds.

Statement of Purpose
Whenever the lease, the purchase, the construction or the acceptance of a donation of real estate is being considered, it is important to review several basic issues. The Local Spiritual Assembly must carefully assess the community's needs and clarify how it wants the property to be used.

A one-or two-page "Statement of Purpose" can focus on needs, priorities, project objectives, program activities to be served, operational management, and the range of budgets for both acquisition and ongoing operation. The statement should be made after thorough consultation about the primary functions for the Center; for example, teaching, child education, public relations, Nineteen Day Feasts, Spiritual Assembly meetings, or social development. Since only a large building could adequately accommodate all

functions, it may be necessary to focus on the major needs of the community at the time.

Consideration of Various Factors
A Baha'i Center can be a place where:
´ The public can obtain information about the Faith

Positive Factors
´ [14.7] The Faith's presence can be established and continually proclaimed by a sign, a phone listing, and a regular address for advertisements and printings
´ The Assembly can maintain its central files Committees, youth clubs, and other groups can meet for activities
´ Children's classes and community deepenings can be held
´ Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Day observances can be held
´ The community library or bookstore can be kept
´ Community firesides and other events can be held
´ Other Baha'i communities may meet

Negative Factors
The demands of a building on a community's resources and energies may be exhausting or may be greater than anticipated. For example, a Baha'i Center could:
´ Drain community finances far beyond expectations
´ Pose significant demands on Baha'is for upkeep of the property, both in time and money
´ Cause divisions within the community over financial and maintenance problems
´ Require supervision that the community does not have the manpower to provide
´ Introduce a formality or stifle spontaneity at the Nineteen Day Feast or other meetings
´ Provide a different environment for firesides or other teaching functions than is available in homes
´ Significantly reduce contributions to the National or International Baha'i Funds
´ Convey a poor image of the Faith if upkeep of the structure and its grounds is not exemplary

Technical Issues
It is important for Local Spiritual Assemblies to gather all the facts before making a decision to acquire a Center. Some of the major areas to research include:
´ Financial requirements
´ Physical considerations
´ Property operation
´ Property maintenance
´ Legal considerations

The following sections of this chapter discuss only the rudimentary issues that must be considered within each of these five areas. The particular facts and requirements will be different for every [14.8] situation, locality, property,

and building. When looking at building codes and zoning requirements, for example, the laws will not only be different from state to state, but often from town to town, and the zoning restrictions may vary within the same block.

For each of the five areas above, the Local Spiritual Assembly may find it helpful to call on sources of information at the local and national levels. By consulting local professionals, the Assembly can determine the feasibility of achieving its objectives and learn of the costs involved, potential legal complications, etc. It may cost several hundred dollars to obtain such consultation, but it will help the Spiritual Assembly avoid ruinous mistakes costing far more.

For general guidance, the Spiritual Assembly may wish to call upon the National Properties Office, which can provide the Assembly with more information, such as what professionals to consult, and possible steps and options to consider. At times, the National Properties Office has put some Assemblies in touch with other Assemblies which have experienced similar situations or put them in touch with Baha'is who are professionals in the area of concern.

The Local Spiritual Assembly must have a clear understanding of its financial status, of the financial requirements of a Center, and of how it intends to meet them.

Financial Requirements
The...Assembly will also need expert advice as to the condition of any building they consider, the cost of rehabilitation, alterations, improvements and furnishings that would be in keeping with their new home. All these factors will bear on the total commitment they will have to undertake and their ability to meet it financially.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 28, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Fund Education'; Chapter 10, Section entitled "Fund Raising")

Relationship Between Local and National Needs
The needs and resources of the local Baha'i community must be compared with those of the National and International Baha'i communities. All Local Spiritual Assemblies have an obligation to contribute to the National and International Funds. Contributions could suffer when an Assembly decides to establish a Baha'i Center. If an Assembly decides to rent, purchase, build, or accept a donated building, it may wish to invite commitments from the local believers for financial support for the Center over and above the amount they normally donate to other funds.

Spiritual Assemblies have often underestimated the costs of maintaining a Baha'i Center. Even donated property is a "fixed [14.9] overhead" that must be satisfied before other needs can be considered. It is a long-term, inflexible commitment.

At this time, the National Spiritual Assembly is unable to provide financial

assistance for the purchase of local property or to assume possession of property that local communities cannot afford to maintain.

Financial Status of the Community

One of the first steps a community should take is to assess the health of its Local Baha'i Fund. Are contributions to the Local Fund regular and consistent, or do occasional large contributions make up for thin months? If the Fund is supported in large part by contributions from a few individual believers, what would happen if one or two of these persons moved out of the community? Does the Fund allow for a safety margin in case of unexpected expenses? Has the community regularly been contributing all that it would like to the National Baha'i Fund, the International Baha'i Fund, and the Continental Baha'i Fund?

Financial Requirements of a Center

We have been asked to say that there is no objection to the Local Assembly looking for a property to purchase for their Haziratu'l-Quds, but they should be reminded that in addition to the initial cost of acquisition they must be prepared to assume the continuing costs of upkeep, maintenance, and services. They should also decide whether they can manage the financial outlay required without interfering with the discharge of their other responsibilities toward the success of the Five Year Plan [1974-1979].

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 6, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The House of Justice does not feel that...the building or buying of a Local Center will necessarily infuse the friends with a dynamic spirit for community development and inspire them to actively teach. On the contrary, the original cost and responsibilities of operation and maintenance may impose a heavy burden on them and create an adverse effect.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 9, 1978, to an individual believer

A Spiritual Assembly must be careful to consider maintenance as well as acquisition expenses. Acquisition expenses may include damage deposit or purchase fees, necessary rehabilitation and renovation, and purchase of furnishings. If the building is to be constructed, the initial costs would be even higher. Yet, these are only the initial fees. Other expenses include monthly rental or mortgage costs, insurance, utilities, upkeep and repair of furnishings and grounds, routine maintenance costs, and deposits into a reserve [14.10] fund for major repairs and replacements of building components. The Assembly can prepare for a Center by developing a budget that includes all anticipated expenses, for both initial costs and ongoing costs, and an additional amount for contingencies.

Use of Pledges

Pledges can be useful as a means of encouraging contributions and of bringing the financial needs of the Cause to the attention of the friends. This method can be particularly helpful in a situation where a Spiritual Assembly has a major task to perform, such as building of a Haziratu'l-Quds or the

establishment of a tutorial school, and needs to have some idea in advance of whether the funds for the project will be available.
The Universal House of Justice, Baha'i Funds, p. 30

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Use of Pledges")

Information sources:

Treasurer of the Local Spiritual Assembly
Local real estate agent or property manager
Local financial adviser

Physical Considerations
Appearance
When looking for property, the Assembly must remember that a Baha'i facility has to meet standards of dignity and quality. Baha'i properties convey a public image of the Faith, which can enhance the prestige of the Cause and contribute to relations with the community at large.

Location
´ If the primary purpose for purchasing a Center is to proclaim the Faith, the property must be visible. A Center may be a teaching and proclamation project supported by Baha'is from throughout the state. In such a case, the building may not necessarily be the primary meeting place for local Baha'is.
´ If the primary purpose for the Baha'i Center is as a meeting place, it may be important that it be centrally located. It may be unnecessary for it to be highly visible.
´ If an Assembly wants to reach a particular population, locating the Baha'i Center near that population may prove helpful.
´ The Assembly should consider the issues of value and public safety.
´ In general, the purpose of the property should help determine its location.

[14.11] Size and Physical Arrangement
The purposes for which the Center is needed will guide decisions about the desired size and physical arrangement of the building. If the Assembly needs adequate space for the Nineteen Day Feasts, for example, the primary meeting room should be large enough to hold the community members and their guests, although rental of a large hall may sometimes be necessary for special events. If the Baha'i Center is to be used for community meetings and child education classes, for example, it may be helpful to have at least two large rooms so that setups for children's classes do not have to be dismantled frequently. These issues should be clarified in the Statement of Purpose.

Other physical considerations include access for the handicapped, parking, compliance with building codes, and life-safety features such as smoke detectors, emergency lighting, and emergency exiting.

Information sources:
Local architect
Local real estate agent
Local building officials

National Properties Office

Property Operation
Proctor
One of the first problems experienced by one Local Spiritual Assembly after it purchased a Baha'i Center was that suddenly each Baha'i became an interior decorator. People rearranged furniture at will, and a few borrowed furniture from the Center for their own personal residences. Their solution was to appoint a proctor. If anyone wanted to make a change or borrow or donate furniture, the proctor had to approve the action. The Assembly drew up a signed agreement with any person who allowed his or her personal property to be used in the Center specifying how long the Assembly could use the property and other terms governing its use.

Property Manager
The property manager should be responsible to the Local Spiritual Assembly but mandated to provide for the Center's overall operation, including beautification, regular cleaning, and other necessary care. The manager would also schedule all activities to be held in the Center. The mandate for the property manager should be in writing so that all responsibilities are clear. If other caretakers are employed, they must understand exactly what is expected of them, or their jobs can easily evolve into virtually every task undertaken at the Center. Without a clear understanding of the caretakers" duties, expectations can easily arise that are not shared by all parties involved.

[14.12] Property and Maintenance Committee
The Assembly also may wish to appoint a Property and Maintenance Committee and to try to use the volunteer services of skilled Baha'is whenever possible. It can request assistance from a local electrician when electrical help is needed, or contact the professional painter for volunteer assistance when painting services are needed. The Committee can decide when it is necessary to pay to have services performed for which it cannot find volunteers. It can also make recommendations to the Assembly for necessary improvements to the building.

Information sources:
Local property management professionals
Local real estate agent
National Properties Office

Property Maintenance
Careless or inadequate maintenance invites misuse and destruction of property, and can result in unsafe conditions or litigation. Incidental costs for general upkeep and repair may include the following:
´ Tools, locks, keys, light bulbs, fuses, etc.
´ Trash removal, upkeep of yard, and landscaping
´ Window, carpet, bathroom, and general cleaning
´ Heating and air conditioning service
´ Refurbishment of drapes, carpets, and furnishings
´ Office equipment and mailing supplies

´ Cups, plates, towels, and refreshments for public meetings
´ Snow removal
´ Pest control
´ Roof, plumbing, electrical, window, and heating repairs
´ Parking lot and sidewalk patching, sealcoating, and striping
´ Gas, water, electricity, and telephone utilities
´ Permits, inspections, property taxes, and assessments
´ Alterations required by city codes

The Baha'i Center always must be kept in good condition and repair. Concern must be given to both safety and beautification. Repairs and upkeep can be very expensive. In one community, the large old house which served as a Baha'i Center required the following expenses in one year: repairs ($4,200), paper and cleaning supplies ($50), and grounds beautification ($400). Another Assembly incurred general cleaning costs for the Baha'i Center of $3,000 in one year. Other Baha'i Centers have had costs for [14.13] windows, sidewalk repairs, parking lot resurfacing, or new roofs that range from $500 to $35,000.

Use of Volunteers
The use of volunteers for these tasks, as discussed in "Property Operation," may reduce the costs, but it will still be necessary to coordinate the volunteers. Some Assemblies have experienced difficulties in getting local Baha'is to provide volunteer maintenance services consistently. The time commitments necessarily involved can prove to be too burdensome for some.

Licensed repairmen and permits are required by law for some work such as electrical, plumbing, heating, and structural modifications.

Setting Aside Funds for Repair and Maintenance
The [National] Treasurer should advise the Assembly to set aside sufficient sums on a regular basis to provide for the repair and maintenance of properties owned by the Faith, so that these can be kept in good condition and so that the normal work of the Cause is not interrupted by sudden requirements of large sums for repairs. Usually the task of maintaining the properties is assigned to a special committee or committees, which should be consulted by the Assembly and can suggest a suitable amount to be set aside annually.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 13, 1981, in Lights of Guidance, p. 257

Information sources:
Local property management professionals
Local building officials
Local real estate agent
National Properties Office
Legal Considerations

Because the laws vary from place to place, the Local Spiritual Assembly must obtain local legal counsel.

Ownership and Leases

According to state law, every property must be owned by someone. In those states where Local Spiritual Assemblies can incorporate, that "someone" is the corporation. In states that do not permit Spiritual Assemblies to incorporate, the situation is a little more complex, but ownership is still possible.

For all properties, either owned or leased, a written purchase agreement or rental agreement is essential, as is a properly recorded deed or lease. Legal counsel should review and, if necessary, modify the purchase or rental agreement before the officers of the Spiritual Assembly sign it or make any written commitments. No oral commitments should be made for real property. Agreements [14.14] should usually include a number of conditional clauses or "riders" for such things as satisfactory building inspection, zoning approval, clear title, financing approval, etc. to ensure that the property can be used in the way that the Spiritual Assembly intends. It may be best to specify the intended uses of the building in the agreement itself.

A complete title insurance policy should be obtained to determine whether the property has any restrictions on it for its intended use and whether a clear title can be delivered, as well as to ensure and protect the Assembly's eventual ownership. Providing a title insurance policy is normally the responsibility of the seller or lessor. Escrow instructions may be desirable, especially when there are matters the seller or landlord must take care of before or after closing.

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Incorporation")

Information sources:
Local attorney
Local real estate agent
National Properties Office
Tax Exemption

Property used for religious purposes usually can be exempted from property taxes, although special assessments and utility district assessments may be charged to the property. The city and county assessors" offices will provide information about the applicable taxes or assessments. Once a property is acquired, the Assembly should apply for a property tax exemption with the appropriate taxing agencies.

Regulations for maintaining the tax exemptions must be reviewed; in some instances, tax-exempt property can only be used by other tax-exempt organizations on a cost recovery fee basis; otherwise the exemption status could be jeopardized or lost. In one state, if a property generates as much as $1.00 profit from rent from a non tax-exempt organization, the property may no longer qualify as 100 percent tax-exempt.

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Tax Exempt Status")

Information sources:
Local attorney
Local tax assessor

National Treasurer's Office
National Properties Office

[14.15] Liability and Insurance
Although the National Spiritual Assembly has a general liability insurance policy that covers local Baha'i activities, Local Spiritual Assemblies that own or lease property must obtain their own insurance coverage.

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Insurance")

Building Codes and Zoning Ordinances
The Assembly must be certain that the property complies with local zoning laws and building codes before it purchases or leases the property. The Assembly may wish to request a letter from the local or county planning department listing permitted uses and activities for the property. If the property needs to be re-zoned, the Assembly should be aware of the necessary steps, and condition its purchase of the property on a successful rezoning petition.

The activities of a Baha'i Center are often defined under the zoning ordinance definitions of the principal and accessory uses for a "church" or a "place of worship." These are definitions within the context of the zoning ordinance.

Zoning laws and building codes may require a minimum number of parking places or limit the number of people who can be in the building or in particular rooms at any one time. To meet the building codes, certain repairs may be required to protect against fire hazards. Even if the building was previously used for the same type of activity, a new occupant may be required to improve the building to meet current standards.

A review with local building officials and agencies can quickly reveal any problems. Generally, the officials will inspect the property at little or no charge and list the potential problems. Careful preparation in this area could save thousands of dollars later.

Information sources:
Local planning or building officials
Local architects and contractors
Local attorney
Local real estate agent
Local tax assessor
National Properties Office

Protection of Baha'i Property
We have noticed from various reports and Minutes received at the World Center that in a number of cases where National or Local Spiritual Assemblies own plots of land located in areas infrequently visited by the friends, squatters have settled. In most cases the Assemblies concerned have succeeded in removing such occupants, but in some cases, in view of the nature of the law [14.16] of the land, Baha'i properties are in jeopardy of being lost, or else compensation is being paid from Baha'i funds to remove the squatters.

We felt that this matter should be brought to your notice for immediate attention. We are confident that National Spiritual Assemblies are usually careful about such matters, but where necessary special measures must be adopted to ensure that such lapses which involve expenditure in time, effort and sometimes the funds of the Faith, do not occur.

It should be remembered that in any case in which squatters have taken possession of Baha'i property, there may be no guarantee that when such squatters are removed, either through legal process and/or payment to them, that others will not take their place. It is therefore important that measures be taken to continue protection of Baha'i properties.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 15, 1971, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

OTHER PROPERTY ISSUES

Jurisdiction of Local Centers

In principle, Local Spiritual Assemblies are responsible for the Baha'i activities and properties within their own jurisdictions. The National Spiritual Assembly has found that Baha'i information centers and community centers often function best if sponsored or owned by only one Baha'i community, even though other communities may sometimes use and support the facility. Too often, the strain and burden of maintaining a center becomes a source of disunity. This possibility is increased when more than one Assembly is responsible for the center.

Contributions

Handling Earmarked Contributions

As to the proceeds from the sale of Baha'i property.... If the property was donated or purchased with funds earmarked for that specific purpose, the proceeds of the sale of the property retain the earmarking unless the donor has specifically provided otherwise. If the donor or donors are living, they may, of course, release the earmarking. If the donor or donors are not living, or refuse to release the earmarking, the proceeds should be used for the same purpose. If that purpose has already been fulfilled (i.e. an alternate property has already been acquired), the surplus should be used to the extent possible in a manner having regard for the original intention of the donor or donors, e.g. to maintain or improve the property.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
August 21, 1980, in Baha'i Funds, p. 24

[14.17] (See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Earmarking" and Appendix B, "Handling Earmarked Contributions")

Contributions from Non-Baha'is

It is not possible to accept a free grant of land from the government to be used as a Temple site. The principle of not accepting gifts from non-Baha'is for strictly Baha'i purposes applies to receiving free grants of land from non-Baha'is, whether individuals, institutions, or governments. There is no objection, however, to accepting free plots of land from the government or

civic authorities if such plots are used for Baha'i cemeteries or such institutions that are charitable or humanitarian in nature, such as schools.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 15, 1972

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Contributions from NonBaha'is")

Rental of Baha'i Property
We have reviewed your letter of July 6, 1970 inquiring if it would be permissible to rent or lend Baha'i school property for periods between Baha'i summer and winter school sessions to non-Baha'i humanitarian or educational organizations.

Decision in these matters is left to the discretion of your National Assembly and the exercise of wisdom in considering all the factors involved. Obviously, you should be certain that such organizations are not objectionable from the Baha'i viewpoint and that their presence on Baha'i school property would not adversely reflect on Baha'i standards of conduct.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 11, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Income-producing Property
We wish to offer the suggestion that...could use the $200,000 to build an Haziratu'l-Quds which would include income-producing property. The income would undoubtedly be freed from the restriction imposed on the principal sum and could therefore be used for general Baha'i purposes. At the same time the larger building would provide space for expansion as the Faith develops.... Possibly your Assembly knows that the National Haziratu'l-Quds of Germany is of this nature. Only a portion of the building is presently used for Baha'i purposes, the balance being rooms and apartments which are rented out.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 6, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[14.18] Sale or Drinking of Alcohol on Baha'i-owned Property
Concerning his comments about renting Baha'i properties to non-Baha'i organizations which may wish to bring alcoholic beverages onto the premises, we have been asked to say that when the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran asked the beloved Guardian about the sale of alcoholic drinks at Baha'i owned premises and restaurants, his secretary, in a letter dated 6 November 1935, wrote on his behalf, "...he asked me to point out that this practice is highly improper and reprehensible and would be tantamount to encouraging acts that are forbidden in the Faith. It is indeed the conscientious duty of every true Baha'i to abandon such practices. However, should a Baha'i owner rent his property with-out himself taking any part whatever in the business, or giving aid to the tenant, then he would incur no responsibility. Nevertheless the landlord should resort to every possible means to rid his premises of the defilement of this degrading business: how far more injurious if he himself were engaged in such repugnant affairs."

The Guardian's secretary also wrote the following on his be-half to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Bombay, on 23 July 1932, regarding...the use of the

Haziratu'l-Quds:

Regarding the Brahma Somaj community, he said that there is no objection for them to hold occasionally at the Baha'i Haziratu'l-Quds a meeting which would be entirely free from any tinge of political involvement. It would not be appropriate, however, for this group to use the Baha'i Headquarters on a regular and permanent basis. This matter should be explained to them with kindness and due deference.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 24, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Dancing in a Baha'i Center
We are asked to say that it is not appropriate for dancing to occur in a local or national Baha'i Center. When a Local Spiritual Assembly acquires a Baha'i Center, it should regard this meeting place as an embryonic Haziratu'l-Quds and should do everything possible to foster in the community a proper attitude of respect for the Center.

Traditional dances associated with the expression of a culture are permissible in Baha'i Centers. However, it should be borne in mind that such traditional dances generally have an underlying theme or a story being represented. Care must be exercised to ensure that the themes of such dances are in harmony with the high [14.19] ethical standards of the Cause and are not portrayals that would arouse base instincts and unworthy passions.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 26, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Local Baha'i Centers,„Embryonic Haziratu'l-Quds")

Use of Churches for Baha'i Functions
Generally there is no objection to holding other Baha'i functions in places or facilities owned and operated by nonBaha'i religious bodies, provided such use does not tend to identify the Faith, in the eyes of the public, with other religions.

The House of Justice leaves the application of this principle to your discretion.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 3, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Reports to the National Spiritual Assembly
The Universal House of Justice requires all National Spiritual Assemblies to report annually on any changes in property holdings at the local and the national level. Changes in property holdings may result from purchase, donation, long-term (more than one-year) lease, sale, or transfer, as well as new construction or demolition of previously-owned property. Reporting is required for all types of property.

The National Spiritual Assembly asks that each Local Spiritual Assembly complete a copy of the Property Record Form whenever there is any change in its

property holdings. A copy of the form can be obtained from the National Properties Office at the Baha'i National Center. The report will be incorporated into the National Spiritual Assembly's report which is sent to the Universal House of Justice.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Accessible Church Buildings, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Division of Evangelical and Local Church Development, 132 W. 31st Street, New York, NY 10115

American Cemetery Magazine, 1501 Broadway, NY 10036

Building Operations Management, a monthly publication, Trade Press Publishing Co., Milwaukee, WI 53000

Cemetery Management Magazine, 3 Skyline Place, Suite 111, 5201 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041

[14.20] Common Bond, a quarterly newsletter dedicated to maintenance and preservation of architecturally significant religious buildings, distributed free to representatives of religious institutions on written request to New York Landmarks Conservancy, 141 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010

The Complete Book of Home Inspection, Becker, Norman, P.E., McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980

Comprehensive Maintenance and Repair Program, State of Maryland, The Association of Physical Plant Administrators of Universities and Colleges, Eleven DuPont Circle, Suite 250, Washington, D.C. 20036, 1983

A Guide to Property and Liability Insurance, for use of leaders charged with the management of a House of Worship or its properties, Insurance Information Institute, 110 William Street, New York, NY 10038

Guidelines and Procedures for Architecture and Building, Maintenance Manual, Making Consensus Decisions in Feasibility Studies, Position Papers, Architecture and Building in the Diocese of Albany, New York, P.O. Box 6297, Quail Station, Albany, NY 12206, (518) 462-5476

How to Manage Real Estate Successfully„In Your Spare Time, Lowry, Albert J., Simon & Schuster, 1977

Inspired, a bi-monthly publication devoted to the preservation of historic religious buildings, Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation, One East Penn Square, Suite 2200, Philadelphia, PA 19107

The Old House, Time-Life Books, 541 North Fairbanks Court, Chicago, IL 60611, 1979

The Old House Journal, a monthly publication, Old House Journal Corporation, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217

Remodeling Old Houses without Destroying Their Character, Stephen, George,

Alfred A. Knopf, 1982

Temple Management Manual, Feldman, Fruhauf, Schoen, National Association of Temple Administrators, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021-7046, 1988

15„APPLICATION OF BAHA'I LAW

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF BAHA'I LAW

[15.1] Nature of the Laws
Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 332

Were He to decree as lawful the thing which from time immemorial had been forbidden, and forbid that which had, at all times, been regarded as lawful, to none is given the right to question His authority.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 87

Whenever My laws appear like the sun in the heaven of Mine utterance, they must be faithfully obeyed by all, though My decree be such as to cause the heaven of every religion to be cleft asunder. He doth what He pleaseth. He chooseth; and none may question His choice. Whatsoever He, the Well-Beloved, ordaineth, the same is, verily, beloved.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 333

The Laws of God are not imposition of will, or of power, or pleasure, but the resolutions of truth, reason and justice.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 154

Man often lacks the understanding to fathom the wisdom of some of the ordinances which are not to his liking. It therefore becomes a matter of demonstration of the depth of his faith when he is faced with a divine command the wisdom and rationale of which he cannot at that time understand.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 3, 1987, to an individual believer

[15.2] Purpose of the Laws
Order and Securtiy
They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 331

True Liberty
True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty.... The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 336

Spiritual Development and Happiness

Just as there are laws governing our physical lives, requiring that we must supply our bodies with certain foods, maintain them within a certain range of temperatures, and so forth, if we wish to avoid physical disabilities, so also there are laws governing our spiritual lives. These laws are revealed to mankind in each age by the Manifestation of God, and obedience to them is of vital importance if each human being, and mankind in general, is to develop properly and harmoniously. Moreover, these various aspects are interdependent. If an individual violates the spiritual laws for his own development he will cause injury not only to himself but to the society in which he lives. Similarly, the condition of society has a direct effect on the individuals who must live within it.

The Universal House of Justice, February 6, 1973,
Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973, pp. 105-6

One of the purposes of religious laws and commandments is to discipline man to do that which is in his best interest.

The Universal House of Justice, March 3, 1987

The ordinances of God have been sent down from the heaven of His most august Revelation. All must diligently observe them. Man's supreme distinction, his real advancement, his final victory, have always depended, and will continue to depend upon them. Whoso keepeth the commandments of God shall attain everlasting felicity.

Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 289

[15.3] The Progressive Application of Baha'i Law

Just as each Prophet brings teachings suited to the age in which He appears, the laws and teachings of the Prophet are progressively applied within each Dispensation.

Many of Baha'u'llah's laws are not binding on Baha'is the world over. Some are binding on some communities but not on others. Some have yet to be applied either because the conditions of society make their application unwise or because the Baha'i community is not yet ready for them. In the following passage, Baha'u'llah describes how the laws of God are revealed over time within a Dispensation so that, through the mercy of God, humanity can gradually adapt to the full implications of those laws.

Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declineth until it reacheth its setting point. Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things....

In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the

providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist.
Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 87-88

Realizing the degree of human frailty, Baha'u'llah has provided that other laws are to be applied only gradually, but these too, once they are applied, must be followed, or else society will not be reformed but will sink into an ever worsening condition.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 6, 1973, in Living the Life, pp. 40-41

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Obedience to the Laws")

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY IN UPHOLDING BAHA'I LAW

Administering the Laws

Upholding the Laws with Firmness

Assemblies must uphold the laws of the Faith with firmness so that the integrity of the Faith may be preserved and the friends be guided to conform their conduct to the teachings. Yet Assemblies must, at the same time, temper their actions with love. Baha'u'llah counseled [15.4] "that "One must guide mankind to the ocean of true understanding in a spirit of love and tolerance" (A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 4). Educating the friends,„especially new believers,„about Baha'u'llah's laws and their purpose, and counseling those who have difficulty adhering to them, are important adjuncts to the enforcement of Baha'i law.

While an Assembly should be loving, sympathetic and patient as it helps each believer understand the necessity of obeying the laws of Baha'u'llah, it nevertheless must let him know that the laws of the Faith cannot be compromised. As Local Spiritual Assemblies grow in their abilities to uphold and enforce the laws of Baha'u'llah, they will exert an even stronger influence on mankind.

Each Local Spiritual Assembly should become the heart and nerve center of its community. The Assemblies should be so educated and equipped with guidance from you that they become pillars of strength for the believers, and sources of knowledge and guidance. The Local Assemblies should neither be like private agents prying into the lives of the believers and seeking out their personal problems, nor should they condone glaring disregard of the Holy Laws. Whenever it becomes known that one of the believers is flagrantly disobeying the Teachings of the Faith, whether spiritual, ethical, moral or administrative, the Assemblies should not allow such a situation to become a source of backbiting among the friends or deteriorate into either the loss of the dignity of the Teachings in the eyes of the Baha'is and non-Baha'is, or the eventual inactivity of the believers, as you have observed. The Assemblies, with the encouragement and under the continuous guidance of your National Assembly, should, in the name of protecting the interests of the Faith, themselves

initiate action for the solution of the problem, and handle it with love, wisdom and firmness.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 12, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Indeed the laws of God are like unto the ocean and the children of men as fish, did they but know it. However, in observing them one must exercise tact and wisdom.... One must guide mankind to the ocean of true understanding in a spirit of love and tolerance.
Baha'u'llah, cited in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 31, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Distinction Between the Attitude of the Institutions and of Individuals
It should be realized that there is a distinction drawn in the Faith between the attitudes which should characterize individuals in their relationship to other people, namely, loving forgiveness, [15.5] forbearance, and concern with one's own sins, not the sins of others, and those attitudes which should be shown by the Spiritual Assemblies, whose duty is to administer the law of God with justice.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 6, 1973,
Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 110

Responsibility of the Individual
While it can be a severe test to a Baha'i to see fellow believers violating Baha'i laws or engaging in conduct inimical to the welfare and best interests of the Faith, there is no fixed rule that a believer must follow when such conduct comes to his notice. A great deal depends upon the seriousness of the offense and upon the relationship which exists between him and the offender.

If the misconduct is blatant and flagrant or threatens the interests of the Faith the believer to whose attention it comes should immediately report it to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Once it is in the hand of the Assembly the believer's obligation is discharged and he should do no more than pray for the offender and continue to show him friendship and encouragement„unless, of course, the Spiritual Assembly asks him to take specific action.

Sometimes, however, the matter does not seem grave enough to warrant reporting to the Spiritual Assembly, in which case it may be best to ignore it altogether. There are also other things that can be done by the Baha'i to whose notice such things come. For example he could foster friendly relations with the individual concerned, tactfully drawing him into Baha'i activities in the hope that, as his knowledge of the teachings and awareness of the Faith deepens, he will spontaneously improve his patterns of conduct. Or perhaps the relationship is such that he can tactfully draw the offender's attention to the teachings on the subject„but here he must be very careful not to give the impression of prying into a fellow-believer's private affairs or of telling him what he must do, which would not only be wrong in itself but might well produce the reverse of the desired reaction.

If a believer faced with knowledge of another Baha'is conduct is unsure what course to take, he can, of course, always consult his Local Spiritual Assembly for advice. If, for some reason, he is reluctant at that stage to inform his Spiritual Assembly, he can consult an Auxiliary Board member or assistant.

Need to Avoid Gossip and Backbiting
Whatever steps are taken, it is vital that the believers refrain from gossip and backbiting, for this can only harm the Faith, causing [15.6] perhaps more damage than would have been caused by the original offense.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 20, 1977, to an individual believer

Handling Violations of Baha'i Law
After learning about a problem that may require action, the Local Spiritual Assembly decides what information it needs, from what sources the information will be obtained, and how it will gather the information. The persons reported to have violated Baha'i law, created disunity, or broken civil laws must be given the opportunity to present their side of the case.

Once the Assembly determines what questions are to be asked and who is to be contacted, it may request individuals to appear before it, send a representative or representatives (who need not be Assembly members) to meet with the person, or gather information by mail or telephone. Assemblies with large Baha'i communities have also found it helpful to appoint committees or task forces on personal status to assist them in gathering background information. Since they must receive information of a sensitive nature, members of such committees and task forces should be trustworthy, and able to maintain confidences.

Due Process
The concept of due process, in the sense of a legal principle which may be embodied in a constitution and which requires the government to treat people fairly, is clearly encompassed by the Baha'i principle of "Divine justice," a principle characterized as "the crowning distinction of all Local and National Assemblies." It is also implicit in the qualities of rectitude of conduct to be manifested "in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Baha'i community...may be called upon to pronounce.'

The term "due process" is also used to indicate a set of formal legal procedures designed to protect the rights of persons accused of wrongdoing. These procedures vary from place to place and may reflect the prevailing political ideology. The Administrative Order has not adopted a formal set of procedures to be applied universally in the Baha'i community for dealing with infringements of Baha'i law. Rather, the Spiritual Assembly in its operation is guided and constrained by the Teachings and committed to protect and preserve the rights of both the individual and the community. Hence, while there is no fixed procedure for the discovery of facts necessary for the adjudication of a case, it is a matter of principle that Assemblies must, before passing judgment, acquaint themselves, through means they themselves devise, with the

facts of any case. [15.7] The principal motive is not to condemn and punish the individual but to assist him, if necessary, to bring his behavior into conformity with the Teachings and also to protect the community.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 20, 1988,
included with a letter dated January 1, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 4, Section entitled "Consultation")

Each Case Considered on Its Own Merits
It is not necessary for your Assembly to anticipate situations which have not arisen, and to lay down general rules and regulations to meet them. It would be wiser to resolve the problem connected with it in the most suitable and practical manner.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 49

There are certain teachings and exhortations the observance of which is solely between the individual and God; the non-observance of other laws and ordinances incurs some form of sanction. Some of these violations incur punishment for a single offense, while others are punished only after repeated warnings have failed to remedy the violation. It is not possible to establish a single rule applicable automatically and invariably. Every case is different, and there is more than one variable consideration to take into account, for example, the circumstances of the individual, the degree to which the good name of the Faith is involved, whether the offense is blatant and flagrant.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 20, 1977, to an individual believer

While reference to previous cases may shed light on how an institution applied the laws and principles of the Faith in a given situation, an Assembly is still obligated to consider all the facts of each case and, after prayerful discussion, arrive at a decision by applying the pertinent spiritual principles.

Investigation, Review of the Facts, Warning When Necessary
There is no justification for the suspension of a believer's administrative rights pending investigation and review of the facts of the matter in which he is involved. As we have repeatedly stated, the application of sanctions is a very serious action and should be imposed only in extreme cases. Furthermore, any decision involving a believer's administrative rights is to be made by action of the Assembly itself. While the Assembly should always be concerned about matters [15.8] which might affect the good name of the Faith, it should be remembered that a believer involved in such matters is entitled to the understanding of the Assembly and may need its guidance and assistance both before and after any decision regarding sanctions is made.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 16, 1969, in Lights of Guidance, p. 57, par. 202

Over and over again the beloved Guardian urged Assemblies to be extremely patient and forbearing in dealing with the friends. He pointed out on many

occasions that removal of administrative rights is the heaviest sanction which Assemblies may impose at the present time.... In all such cases it is for the Assembly to determine at what point the conduct is blatant and flagrant or is harmful to the name of the Faith. They must determine whether the believer has been given sufficient warning before the imposition of sanctions.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 20, 1977, to an individual believer

The principle that an Assembly should repeatedly warn an offender to correct his ways before it deprives him of his voting rights applies to such continuing offenses as flagrant immorality, or membership in non-Baha'i religious organizations. It cannot be applied in the same way to a one-time offense such as breach of Baha'i marriage laws.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 4, "Consultation'; Chapter 16, Section entitled "Violations of Baha'i Marriage Law„Removal of Administrative Rights")

Removal of Administrative Rights
Ignorance of the Law
In applying these laws and principles your Assembly should, of course, exercise the greatest wisdom, understanding, love and patience. The sanction of withdrawal of voting rights is the greatest punishment which a National Assembly may impose upon a believer and for that reason it should not be exercised unless it is clear that the believer with full knowledge of the laws involved deliberately violated them. Each case should be considered individually and on its own merits.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 20, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[15.9] If your National Assembly is convinced that one is entirely ignorant of the existence of the Baha'i laws in this regard, he should not be deprived of his voting rights for disobedience to them;...
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 19, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Function of National Spiritual Assembly Only
It will be noted that the model By-laws for Local Spiritual Assemblies sent to you...provide for Local Assemblies to exercise [the] function of withdrawing or restoring voting rights of individual believers under their jurisdiction.

This provision was made in the By-laws because this is inherently a Local Assembly function. However, for the present, National Assemblies should continue to exercise this function, and should so inform Local Assemblies under their jurisdiction, if they have not already done so.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 5, 1965, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Cannot Withdraw to Avoid Baha'i Law

A believer cannot escape administrative expulsion by the ruse of resigning from the Faith in order to break its law with impunity. However, the Assembly should be satisfied that there was indeed such an ulterior motive behind the withdrawal. A believer's record of inactivity and his general attitude to the Faith may well lead the Assembly to conclude that his withdrawal was bona fide...and in such a case the withdrawal may be accepted.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 20, 1971

Any member of the Baha'i Community who finds that he does not believe in Baha'u'llah and His Revelation is free to withdraw from the Faith and such a withdrawal should be accepted. But a Baha'i who continues to believe in Baha'u'llah cannot withdraw from the Baha'i Community. While he believes in this Revelation he is subject to its laws.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 8, 1970

Limited Sanctions
It is also quite permissible for a National Spiritual Assembly to debar an individual believer from serving on a Local Spiritual Assembly without removing his or her voting rights and they may also debar a believer from attending the consultative part of a Nineteen Day Feast. You may also debar a believer from voting in elections without imposing all the other administrative sanctions involved in administrative expulsion.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 31, 1972

(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Removal from Assembly membership," and also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Irresponsible Behavior")

Applied to a Youth
With reference to the question in your second letter as to what disciplinary action can be taken against youth who are not of voting age, it must be remembered that the removal of his voting rights is administrative expulsion. In addition to being deprived of his right to vote, the believer cannot attend Feasts or other meetings for Baha'is only; cannot contribute to the Fund; or, cannot have a Baha'i marriage ceremony. The restrictions against voting would become operative when the young offender reaches voting age.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 14, 1965

Distinction Between Function as Adviser and Role as Enforcer
The National Spiritual Assembly should distinguish between its functions as an adviser and counselor of the friends and its role as the enforcer of Baha'i Law. For example, it is quite in order for the Assembly to advise a believer to consult a psychiatrist or any other doctor, if it feels this is necessary, but such advice should not be linked with any deprivation of voting rights which may have to be imposed for flagrant immorality. You may feel it advisable to give such advice to a person who is being deprived of his voting rights, but the two actions should be clearly separate,„one is administrative, the other is advice given for the person's own good which he may or may not accept as he wishes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 21, 1965

Recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly
In all cases involving the possible removal or restoration of a believer's administrative rights, the Local Spiritual Assembly should forward a recommendation to the National Spiritual Assembly with reasons for the recommendation.

A report to the National Spiritual Assembly should include the following:
´ A statement defining the problem, including individuals" names and identification numbers
´ A list of all relevant facts
´ A brief summary of the case, including all actions undertaken by the Local Spiritual Assembly
´ The Assembly's recommendation of a course of action and the rationale for it

[15.11] After reviewing the report, the National Assembly may ask the Local Assembly for further information before making a decision.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Restoration of Administrative Rights'; Chapter 3, Section entitled "Outgoing Correspondence," and also see Chapter 6, Section entitled "Special Enrollment Procedures-Mainland Chinese")

Meaning of Deprivation of Administrative Rights
Regarding the matter of believers who have been deprived of their voting rights; just as no one should ever be deprived of his voting right lightly, it should, likewise, be realized that to be deprived of it is a grave matter, and involving heavy penalties spiritually. People who have been so deprived should not be permitted to attend any meetings involving the administration of the Cause, such as an election or a Nineteen Day Feast. They can attend the Nine Holy Days; however, they should not be married by Baha'i Law, no money should be accepted from them, they should not be given credentials (which imply a member of the community in good standing), nor should they be used officially as teachers or speakers.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 88

A Baha'i who has lost his administrative rights is administratively expelled from the community and therefore is not subject to the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Assembly in the matter of laws of personal status, such as divorce, unless, of course, he is involved in such a matter through having a Baha'i spouse in good standing from whom the divorce is taking place. His observance of such laws is a matter of conscience and he would not be subject to further sanctions for non-observance of Baha'i laws during the period he is without voting rights.

In the case you mention, therefore, where the Baha'i without voting rights is being divorced from his non-Baha'i wife, the Assembly should not take jurisdiction of the matter. He is free to obtain a civil divorce and whether or not he observes a year of waiting is a matter for his own conscience.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 6, 1982, to an individual believer

One who has lost his voting rights is considered to be a Baha'i but not one in good standing. The following restrictions and limitations apply to such a believer:
´ He cannot attend Nineteen Day Feasts or other meetings for [15.12] Baha'is only, including International Conferences, and therefore cannot take part in consultation of the affairs of the community.
´ He cannot contribute to the Baha'i Fund.
´ He cannot receive newsletters and other bulletins whose circulation is restricted to Baha'is.
´ He cannot have a Baha'i marriage ceremony and therefore is not able to marry a Baha'i.
´ He may not have a Baha'i pilgrimage.
´ Although he is free to teach the Faith on his own behalf, he should not be used as a teacher or speaker in programs sponsored by Baha'is.
´ He is debarred from participating in administrative matters, including the right to vote in Baha'i elections.
´ He cannot hold office or be appointed to a committee.
´ He should not be given credentials (which imply that he is a Baha'i in good standing).
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 9, 1985, published in Lights of Guidance, pp. 61-62, par. 216

Although generally speaking a believer deprived of his voting rights is not restricted except as stated above, the following privileges have been expressly stipulated as not denied:
´ He may attend the observances of the nine Holy Days.
´ He may attend any Baha'i function open to non-Baha'is.
´ He may receive any publication available to non-Baha'is.
´ He is free to teach the Faith as every individual believer has been enjoined by Baha'u'llah to teach.
´ Association with other believers is not forbidden.
´ He may have the Baha'i burial service if he or his family requests it, and he may be buried in a Baha'i cemetery.
´ Baha'i charity should not be denied him on the ground that he has lost his voting rights.
´ Baha'i institutions may employ him, but should use discretion as to the type of work he is to perform.
´ He should have access to the Spiritual Assembly.
Enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 9, 1985, in Lights of Guidance, p. 62, par. 217

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Opposition to the Faith," and also see Chapter 7, Section entitled "Believers Deprived of [15.13] their Administrative Rights" and Chapter 10, Section entitled "Withholding the Privilege of Giving")

Attitude of Community toward Those Deprived
The degree to which a community should be active or passive towards a believer

who is deprived of his voting rights depends upon the circumstances in each individual case. Obviously, it is desirable that such a person should come to see the error of his ways and rectify his condition. In some cases friendly approaches by the Baha'is may help to attain this; in other cases the individual may react more favorably if left to his own devices for a time.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 1, 1973, in Lights of Guidance, p. 60, par. 212

It is only those who have been spiritually excommunicated by the Guardian with whom the believers are forbidden to associate, and not a person who is being punished by being deprived of his voting rights.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 8, 1947, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 123

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Restoration of Administrative Rights")

Handling Appeals
When an individual wishes to appeal a decision of the Local Spiritual Assembly, the person first asks the Assembly to reconsider the matter, stating why he or she feels the reconsideration is justified. If the person is not satisfied with the decision of the Local Spiritual Assembly, they may appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly by requesting that the Local Spiritual Assembly forward the appeal to the National Assembly. The process to be followed is explained in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice:

An appellant, whether institution or individual, shall in the first instance make appeal to the Assembly whose decision is questioned, either for reconsideration of the case by that Assembly or for submission to a higher body. In the latter case the Assembly is in duty bound to submit the appeal together with full particulars of the matter. If an Assembly refuses to submit the appeal, or fails to do so within a reasonable time, the appellant may take the case directly to the higher authority.
The Universal House of Justice,
The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, p. 15

If the individual or Local Assembly is dissatisfied with the decision of the National Assembly, the case may be appealed to the Universal House of Justice through the National Assembly. While the appeal [15.14] is in progress, the individual must abide by the decision of the Local or National Assembly, even though he may think the decision is wrong.

References for further reading:
Local Spiritual Assembly By-Laws, Article X
The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 55

Second Party Appeals
You are correct in your understanding that an aggrieved party should appeal on his own behalf from a decision of a Spiritual Assembly. Appeal by proxy„that is, on the initiative of someone else„is not acceptable. However, any believer may exercise the freedom to request a Spiritual Assembly to reconsider

a decision, regardless of the individual or individuals affected by it; but the Assembly has the right to determine whether or not to accede to such a request.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 1, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Assembly Is Obligated to Forward an Appeal
If an appeal has been made you have no alternative but to forward it.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 15, 1979, to a National Spiritual Assembly

May Be Preferable to Drop Appeal
He suggests you let the entire matter of your appeal drop. Unless a very serious major issue is involved...to drive these subjects home is far more likely to do the Cause harm than good.

There are many mistakes made, but they are, for the most part, not serious enough to warrant creating inharmony and raising issues which lead to endless argument and discussion, wasting time and energy better spent on creative action.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated December 8, 1950, to an individual believer

(See also Chapter 1, Section entitled "The Relation of the Baha'is with the Assembly")

Restoration of Administrative Rights
An individual may regain his rights and privileges of Baha'i membership by expressing sincere repentance and by demonstrating that the condition that led to the deprivation of his rights has been corrected. In the case of a violation of Baha'i marriage law, the request for reinstatement must indicate a willingness to correct the matter by having a Baha'i marriage ceremony (or obtaining a civil divorce) or to obey whatever other instructions may be given by the National Spiritual Assembly. If the individual lives within the jurisdiction [15.15] of a Local Spiritual Assembly, his application for restoration of his rights should be made to that institution which will forward his request to the National Spiritual Assembly with its recommendation. If the individual does not live within the jurisdiction of a local Assembly, he may apply directly to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Each case must be considered on its own merits and no hard and fast rules can be laid down. It is for your Assembly to determine, in each case, whether the facts justify restoration of voting rights. Restoration of voting rights often requires repentance by the offender, but the standards governing such repentance must not be confused with those relative to the repentance of a Covenant-breaker. Expression of repentance is the way in which a former Covenant-breaker makes known his change of heart and involves the fact that the individual knows what it is that he has done wrong and says so. In the case of deprivation of voting rights, however, the repentance required to be shown differs in degree and form from case to case.

At one extreme is the case of a believer who is no longer able to rectify the wrong he has committed,„for example when he has lost his voting rights for marrying without parental consent and the parents have since died,„in such a case the factor of repentance is particularly important. At the other extreme is the case of a believer who has been deprived of his voting rights because the Assembly is convinced by the evidence that he was guilty of the offense, but who maintains that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he is innocent. There is no requirement that such a believer admit guilt before the voting rights can be restored. The believer must, however, comply with the Assembly's instructions as to his behavior. In between these extremes are many cases where the very rectifying of the error can be held to constitute repentance.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 7, 1979,
in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 248, par. 9.4.4

It can happen, for example, that voting rights are removed mistakenly and the incorrect action of the Assembly is the basis for the believer's application for their restoration. If the voting rights have been removed justifiably it is generally sufficient for the believer to take the necessary actions to have them restored; his application for restoration and compliance with the requirements of Baha'i law are sufficient evidence of repentance. However, if the Assembly [15.16] sees that the believer does not understand the reason for the deprivation and has a rebellious attitude it should endeavor to make the matter clear to him. If his attitude is one of contempt for the Baha'i law and his actions have been in serious violation of its requirements, the Assembly may even be justified in extending the period of deprivation beyond the time of the rectification of the situation,„but such cases, by their nature, are very rare.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 21, 1976,
in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 248, par. 9.4.4

LAWS AND STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR SUBJECT TO ADMINISTRATIVE SANCTIONS

Non-observance of certain laws and ordinances incurs some form of sanction. While some violations incur punishment for a single offense, other punishments are incurred only if, after repeated warnings, the believer fails to remedy the violation. Examples of violations of law and standards of conduct subject to sanction:
´ Immorality
´ Cohabitation
´ Homosexuality
´ Drinking of alcohol
´ Owning a business that sells alcohol
´ Use of illegal drugs
´ Violation of the marriage laws (discussed separately in Chapter 16, "Marriage")
´ Violation of the divorce laws (discussed separately in Chapter 17, "Divorce")

´ Political activity
´ Criminal offenses, disobedience to civil laws
´ Murder
´ Physical/sexual abuse
´ Tax evasion
´ Robbery
´ Membership in other organizations
´ Other religious organizations
´ Secret societies
´ Gambling
´ Behavior which damages the reputation of the Faith or causes disunity
´ Dishonest or fraudulent behavior
´ Irresponsible behavior

Immorality
Flagrant Immorality
As regards flagrant immorality, this is a matter which has to be dealt with through exhortations and warnings, like the problem of [15.17] drinking, and when there is complete and insistent disregard of these reminders, then sanctions will have to be imposed, but restored upon rectification of the mistake and a sincere expression of repentance.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 12, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

As to deprivation of voting rights for immorality, while we may not have written you on the subject it should be clear that sanctions should not be imposed for isolated acts of immorality. Only extreme cases involving acts of blatant and flagrant immorality reflecting on the name of the Faith and repeated time after time in spite of warnings should be taken as a basis for suspension of voting rights.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 14, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Generally, administrative rights should not be suspended because of the birth of a child out of wedlock. The questions to be considered are whether the party is guilty of blatant and flagrant immorality, whether such conduct is harming the Faith, and whether the believer has refused or neglected to improve her conduct despite repeated warnings.

As you no doubt know, deprivation of administrative rights is a very serious sanction, and the beloved Guardian repeatedly cautioned that it should be exercised only in extreme situations. In a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to another National Spiritual Assembly which asked similar questions, it was pointed out that it was the task of the institutions to provide both counsel and education for the believers, and thereafter it is for the individual Baha'i to determine his course of conduct in relation to the situations of his daily life.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, p. 58

References for further reading:
A Chaste and Holy Life
Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, pp. 107-8

Cohabitation
When considering cases of couples who are living together without being married it is important to distinguish those who started this association after becoming Baha'is from those who [15.18] were in this condition already at the time of accepting the Faith. The House of Justice is sure that your Assembly is aware that it is not permissible for Baha'is to enter into such an immoral relationship and that any believers who do so must be counselled by the Assembly and warned to correct their conduct, either by separating or by having a Baha'i marriage ceremony in accordance with the provision of Baha'i Law. If, after repeated warnings, the believers concerned do not conform to Baha'i Law, the Assembly has no choice but to deprive them of their voting rights.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 7, 1981, in Lights of Guidance, p. 379

The Guardian has instructed me to say that companionate marriage, where there is no legal or religious marriage, is an immoral relationship and we cannot accept as believers those who are openly behaving in this way.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 26, 1957, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Homosexuality
Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low water mark in history is the question of immorality, and overemphasis of sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Baha'u'llah, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated May 21, 1954, in A Chaste and Holy Life, pp. 12-13

A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and transsexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Baha'u'llah that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 6, 1973, in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 110

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual [15.19] acts is wrong. Immorality of every

sort is really forbidden by Baha'u'llah, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature.

To be afflicted in this way is a great burden upon a conscientious soul.

But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap.

God judges each soul on its own merits. The Guardian cannot tell you what the attitude of God would be towards a person who lives a good life in most ways, but not in this way. All he can tell you is that it is forbidden by Baha'u'llah, and that one so afflicted should struggle and struggle again to overcome it. We must be hopeful of God's mercy but not impose upon it.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, National Baha'i Review, March 1968, p. 2

Regarding the question you asked him about one of the believers who seems to be flagrantly a homosexual„although to a certain extent we must be forbearing in the matter of people's moral conduct because of the terrible deterioration in society in general, this does not mean that we can put up indefinitely with conduct which is disgracing the Cause. This person should have it brought to his attention that such acts are condemned by Baha'u'llah, and that he must mend his ways,...which is corruptive for him and bad for the Cause. If after a period of probation you do not see an improvement, he should have his voting rights taken away.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 20, 1953, in Messages to Canada, p. 39

References for further reading:
A Chaste and Holy Life
Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, pp. 110-11

Alcohol
The Assemblies must be wise and gentle in dealing with such cases (i.e. Baha'is using alcoholic beverages), but at the same time must not tolerate a prolonged and flagrant disregard of the Baha'i Teachings as regards alcohol.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 26, 1956, in Baha'i News, June 1958, p. 16

With regard to the problem of alcoholism, which is indeed a terrible scourge to mankind, it must never become a source of disunity among believers. Baha'u'llah's principle, in case of sickness, [15.20] is to consult the best physician you can, follow his advice, and pray. If therefore, you have consulted Alcoholics Anonymous, this should be your procedure. If, however, you are not satisfied with them, you are entirely free to consult someone else. But the same principle would apply. Do what the doctor (or expert) says and pray.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 14, 1963, to individual believers

As to those believers who continue to drink, they should be lovingly exhorted, then firmly warned and eventually deprived of their voting rights. The number of times a person is exhorted and warned is a matter left to the discretion of

each Local Spiritual Assembly, in consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly. The policy you adopt should not be one of removing the administrative rights of the believers in a bureaucratic and automatic way, as this would be unwise and unjust. Your Assembly as well as all Local Spiritual Assemblies should courageously and continuously remind the friends of their obligation in this respect, handle firmly all flagrant cases, and use such cases, in a way that by force of example, they exert their influence upon the other believers. It must be made clear to the Local Assemblies that they should be willing to cooperate with the believers affected by such drinking habits, when any such believer promises gradually and systematically to reduce his drinking with the objective in mind of entirely abandoning this habit.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 12, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 19, Section entitled "Serving Alcohol")

Owning a Business That Sells Alcohol
Alcohol must not be served in a restaurant or other business which is wholly owned by Baha'is.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 31, 1982

Institutions that are entirely managed by Baha'is are, for reasons that are only too obvious, under the obligation of enforcing all the laws and ordinances of the Faith, especially those whose observance constitutes a matter of conscience. There is no reason, no justification whatsoever, that they should act otherwise....
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 2, 1935, enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 8, 1982

[15.21] Concerning the third question (sale of alcoholic drinks at Baha'i-owned premises and restaurants), the beloved Guardian has asked me to point out that this practice is highly improper and reprehensible and would be tantamount to encouraging acts that are forbidden in the Faith. It is indeed the conscientious duty of every true Baha'i to abandon such practices. However, should a Baha'i owner rent his property without himself taking any part whatever in the business, or giving aid to the tenant, then he would incur no responsibility. Nevertheless the landlord should resort to every possible means to rid his premises of the defilement of this degrading business; how far more injurious if he himself were engaged in such repugnant affairs.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, November 6, 1935,
enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 8, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Concerning the sale of alcohol by a believer, as you state, "Obviously he should cease to deal in the sale of alcohol in his shop." However, as he is a new believer and was engaged in this business before becoming a Baha'i, he should be given a reasonable opportunity to find another means whereby he can earn a living and should be given every assistance by the National Spiritual Assembly to do so. He should be treated with patience and understanding,

especially if he is making efforts to dispose of this business and to seek other employment. However, if after a reasonable time has elapsed and no effort has been made to comply with the Baha'i law, then, as a last resort, the Assembly would have no alternative but to suspend his administrative rights.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 13, 1974, enclosed with a letter written on its behalf, February 8, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

We have found no explicit text or instruction of the beloved Guardian on such a situation (the sale of alcoholic beverages by a business in which a Baha'i is a partner with non-Baha'is) and feel that it is one in which no hard and fast rules should be drawn at the present time.... We feel that this is a matter which needs to be decided in each case in the light of the spirit of the teachings and the circumstances of the case, and unless the situation is one which is endangering the good name of the Faith or is obviously a ruse on the part of the believer to evade the Baha'i law, it should be left to the conscience of the believer concerned who should, of course, be informed of the Baha'i teachings concerning [15.22] alcohol and should make every effort to dissociate himself from such an activity.

The above (paragraph) concerns Baha'is who are already in partnerships dealing in such matters. It is, however, obvious that a Baha'i who is not in such a situation should not enter into it.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 15, 1976, to the International Teaching Center, enclosed with a letter written on its behalf, February 8, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

You will note in the enclosed quotations a reference to a Baha'i's being in partnership with non-Baha'is, and the instruction that each such case should be judged on its own merits. The House of Justice instructs us to state here that in the partnership of Mr...., Mrs...., Mr...., and Mr...., the fact that Mrs....is not a Baha'i is no justification for the majority of the partners, who are Baha'is, permitting the service of alcohol in their restaurant.
From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 8, 1982, to a National Assembly

(See also Chapter 19, Section entitled "Serving Alcohol")

Serving Alcohol
In response to questions raised on the permissibility of serving alcoholic drinks in a number of different circumstances, the Universal House of Justice has formulated the following guidelines.

The fact that Baha'is themselves must not drink alcohol is abundantly clear and needs no comment here. With regard to the serving of alcohol to non-Baha'is:

1. No Baha'i institution should serve alcohol to non-Baha'is under any circumstances.

2. If an individual Baha'i is entertaining an individual guest or a small group of guests as an official representative of the Baha'i community, he should not

serve alcohol in his own home, but must use his discretion whether or not to do so if the entertaining is taking place in a restaurant.

3. No Baha'i should serve alcohol at any function or reception given by him, such as a wedding reception or a party to which a number of people are invited.

4. When a Baha'i is privately entertaining an individual non-Baha'i or a small group of guests in his own home, he must himself judge whether or not to serve alcohol. This will depend to a great degree on the customs of the country in which he is living, the individuals concerned, and the host's relationship [15.23] to his guests. Obviously it is better for the Baha'i not to serve alcohol if possible, but against this he must weigh the probable reaction of the guest in the circumstances which prevail and in the particular situation. In some countries there would be no problem in failing to provide alcohol to a guest; in others it would be regarded as extremely peculiar and antisocial and would immediately raise a barrier to further contact. It is not desirable to make a major issue of the matter.

5. When such private entertaining of an individual or small group of non-Baha'is is taking place in a restaurant the same general principles as in point 4 above apply, except that in such a public place a failure to provide alcoholic drinks would be less easily understood than in a private home, and the Baha'i must use his discretion accordingly.

6. Alcohol must not be served in a restaurant or other business which is wholly owned by Baha'is.

7. If a Baha'i is employed by others in a job which involves the serving of alcohol, he is not obliged to change the employment. This is a matter left to each individual to decide in the light of his own conscience. Obviously such kinds of employment vary widely from bartending to serving in a grocery in which wine is retailed. If the job requires a great deal of involvement with the serving of alcohol it is better for the Baha'i to obtain other employment if he can.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 8, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Such employments (Baha'is who are in the employment of non-Baha'is and whose employment involves the serving or selling of alcoholic beverages) cover every wide range of degree in involvement, therefore it is left to the individual to decide whether or not he feels his employment violates the spirit of the Baha'i law. In cases of doubt he can, of course, consult his Spiritual Assembly for advice....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 15, 1976, enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 8, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Political Activity
But if a certain person does enter into party politics and labors for the ascendancy of one party over another, and continues to do it against expressed

appeals and warnings of the Assembly, [15.24] then the Assembly has the right to refuse him the right to vote in Baha'i elections.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 30

The same sanction (i.e., removal of voting rights) should apply to those who persistently refuse to dissociate themselves from political and ecclesiastical activities.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 87

Use of Illegal Drugs
Regarding hashish...Gracious God! This is the worst of all intoxicants, and its prohibition is explicitly revealed. Its use causeth the disintegration of thought and the complete torpor of the soul. How could anyone seek this fruit of the infernal tree, and by partaking of it, be led to exemplify the qualities of a monster? How could one use this forbidden drug, and thus deprive himself of the blessings of the All-Merciful?...Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but...this wicked hashish extinguisheth the mind, freezeth the spirit, petrifieth the soul, wasteth the body and leaveth man frustrated and lost.
'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in National Baha'i Review, March 1968, p. 2

Concerning the so-called "spiritual" virtues of the hallucinogens...spiritual stimulation should come from turning one's heart to Baha'u'llah and not through physical means such as drugs and agents.

...Hallucinogenic agents are a form of intoxicant. As the friends, including the youth, are required to strictly abstain from all forms of intoxicants, and are further expected conscientiously to obey the civil law of their country, it is obvious that they should refrain from using these drugs.
The Universal House of Justice, dated April 15, 1965,
in National Baha'i Review, March 1968, p. 2

In reply to your letter of March 23, 1976, the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that the word "marijuana" does not appear as such in our Sacred Scriptures. However, marijuana contains the same narcotic as hashish (hemp) and the same prohibition applies to its use as applies to the use of hashish.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 3, 1976, to an individual believer

Criminal Offenses, Disobedience to Civil Laws
We have carefully reviewed your letter...inquiring about the attitude to be adopted by your National Assembly [15.25] regarding believers who have been charged with criminal offenses, suspected to have committed such offenses, or convicted by the court. The principle to bear in mind is that each case falling in any of the aforementioned categories should be considered separately and on its own merits. No hard and fast rule should be applied.

If the believer's actions conspicuously disgrace the Faith and such actions

seriously injure its reputation, the National Assembly may in its discretion apply the sanction of deprivation of voting rights.

We feel that the Assembly should exercise its utmost wisdom when depriving believers of their administrative privileges, each case should be considered on its individual merits, and it should be realized that the application of Baha'i sanctions is not an automatic action in response to a verdict of the court.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 3, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a member of the Baha'i community violates criminal law, the National Spiritual Assembly should be informed. In such cases, the Local Spiritual Assembly should submit a report that summarizes the crime, including the person's response, the findings of the criminal court, and any other pertinent information, including newspaper clippings. The Local Spiritual Assembly should also include its recommendation as to whether the person's rights of membership should be revoked, since violation of criminal law does not automatically cause one to lose his Baha'i membership rights.

Criminal Matters in Which the State Claims Exclusive Interest
Your Assembly should make a distinction between those actions which can be dealt with at present by the Baha'i administrative institutions and those which are criminal in character and fall within the purview of the civil authorities. In general, misconduct on the part of individual Baha'is and differences between the friends should be adjudicated by Spiritual Assemblies, and the friends should obey the Assemblies' decisions. However, in criminal matters in which the State claims a prior interest and has clearly laid down the procedures to be followed, and the action of Assemblies would amount to interference with these procedures, such matters must be referred to the civil authorities.

Since at the present time Baha'i institutions are not authorized to deal with criminal matters, you should seek the advice of legal experts in reconciling the observance of confidentiality, which is essential to the functioning of any Spiritual Assembly, and the [15.26] Assembly's obligation to uphold Government regulations in criminal cases.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 5, 1985, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If an Assembly is handling a case in which the state has exclusive interest (such as child abuse, sexual molestation, battering, severe neglect, etc.), it must be careful not to interfere with the established legal procedures. For example, most states require all suspected cases of child abuse to be reported to the civil authorities. In those states, Baha'i institutions would be legally required to report all such cases to the appropriate social service agencies. In addition, many states require persons in certain positions, i.e. teachers, doctors, etc., to report these types of cases.

(See also Chapter 3, Sections entitled "Confidential Matters May Be Recorded Separately" and "Privileged Communications'; Chapter 4, Section entitled

"Confidentiality'; Chapter 17, Section entitled "In Case of Suspected Child Abuse or Domestic Violence'; By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article IV regarding noninterference in matters of civil jurisdiction)

Physical Abuse

The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Baha'i Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Baha has written, "O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned."

Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being, be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behavior by the Revelation of Baha'u'llah.

...No Baha'i husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Baha'u'llah.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 24, 1993, to an individual believer

[15.27] Sexual Abuse

It is difficult to imagine a more reprehensible perversion of human conduct than the sexual abuse of children, which finds its most debased form in incest.... A parent who is aware that the marriage partner is subjecting a child to such sexual abuse should not remain silent, but must take all necessary measures, with the assistance of the Spiritual Assembly or civil authorities if necessary, to bring about an immediate cessation of such grossly immoral behavior, and to promote healing and therapy.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 24, 1993, to an individual believer

Membership in Other Organizations

Other Religious Organizations

Concerning membership in non-Baha'i religious associations, the Guardian wishes to re-emphasize the general principle already laid down in his communications to your Assembly and also to the individual believers that no Baha'i who wishes to be a wholehearted and sincere upholder of the distinguishing principles of the Cause can accept full membership in any non-Baha'i ecclesiastical organization. For such an act would necessarily imply only a partial acceptance of the Teachings and laws of the Faith, and an incomplete recognition of its independent status, and would thus be tantamount to an act of disloyalty to the verities it enshrines. For it is only too obvious that in most of its fundamental assumptions the Cause of Baha'u'llah is completely at variance with outworn creeds, ceremonies and institutions. To be a Baha'i and at the same time accept membership in another religious body is simply an act of

contradiction that no sincere and logically minded person can possibly accept. To follow Baha'u'llah does not mean accepting some of His teachings and rejecting the rest.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 15, 1935, in Baha'i News, #93, July 1935, p. 1

To remain a member of the church is not proper for us, for we do so under false pretense. We should therefore withdraw from our churches but continue to associate, if we wish to, with the church members and ministers.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, pp. 30-31

Secret Societies
Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is not permissible to the friends. The friends should not become members of secret societies.

Your Assembly is advised to carefully inform the friends of these principles and to deepen them in their understanding and appreciation [15.28] of them. Having made certain that all friends, especially those directly concerned, have been so deepened, your Assembly should then set a time limit by which the friends must obey your directive to withdraw their membership in the organization. Each case will have to be considered on its own merits. Some of the friends may have to fulfill certain commitments as officers before they can withdraw with honor. The time limit should make allowances in such cases.

Whereas persistence in membership in these and in similar organizations is ample ground for deprivation of voting rights, your Assembly is advised to give sufficient time for each of the friends to be thoroughly deepened, and to comply with the principles before any disciplinary action is taken.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 26, 1963, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Membership in Secret Organizations, Other Religious Organizations, and Political Involvement'; Chapter 12, Section entitled "Association with Other Organizations")

Gambling, Lotteries
Although we have not found any text which forbids the owning of race horses, horse racing as a means of winning the prize money and betting at race courses, we quote the translation of a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha on horse racing:

Betting on horse racing is a pernicious disease. It hath been seen in Europe what distress this hath caused. Thousands have become afflicted and distraught. The friends of God must engage in work which is lawful and attracteth blessings, so that God's aid and bounty may always surround them." (Translated from the Persian)
From a letter of the Universal House of Justice,
June 20, 1972, in Lights of Guidance, pp. 358-359, par.1202

Although we may have written to you previously commenting on the question as to whether lotteries and betting, such as betting on football games, bingo, etc. are included under the prohibition of gambling, we repeat that this is a matter that is to be considered in detail by the Universal House of Justice. In the meantime, your National Assembly should not make an issue of this matter and should leave it to the consciences of the individual friends who ask to decide for themselves in each case.
The Universal House of Justice, September 12, 1965,
in Lights of Guidance, p. 359, par. 1203

[15.29] (See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "Lotteries, Games of Chance, Raffles")

Behavior that Damages the Reputation of the Faith or Causes Disunity
Dishonest or Fraudulent Behavior
Regarding Mr...: it was with the approval of the Guardian that his name was removed from the voting list. It is very bad for the Cause to have a member of the Community, actively, in the public eye, teaching the Faith, and at the same time showing dishonest characteristics. We cannot possibly say that because a person also has many virtues, faults as grave as lying and dishonorable conduct regarding money can be overlooked! This means that we tolerate as representatives of our Faith people who flagrantly disobey its laws and fundamental teachings. This does not mean there is no hope for Mr.... ; let him change his conduct, if he really loves the Cause, and then a way will be opened for him to again be active. But the change must be real and obvious; mere protestations will serve no purpose.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand, p. 52

(See also Chapter 19, Section entitled "Handling Business Disputes")

Irresponsible Behavior
Limited sanctions (i.e. restrictions on one's eligibility to serve on institutions or participate in community events) are usually imposed in cases where the individual disrupts the unity of the community, or is mentally unfit and unable to exercise judgment or behave responsibly. The Universal House of Justice has clearly indicated that a National Spiritual Assembly may debar an individual from serving on a Local Spiritual Assembly without removing his administrative rights.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 31, 1972

Mental Illness/Psychological Problems
As larger numbers of people become Baha'is, the institutions as well as individual believers will have to learn to accommodate and to assist those persons who, while perhaps not mentally ill by medical definition, nonetheless have negative, unpleasant or disruptive personalities. When a believer has emotional or psychological problems which render him incapable of behaving responsibly, the Local Spiritual Assembly must, to safeguard the welfare of the

community, consider what it can do to minimize the person's influence. On the one hand it must help such persons and give them loving attention, and on the other it must remain alert to shelter the Cause which may ultimately be the person's only source of consolation and assistance.

[15.30] A Local Spiritual Assembly can and should advise a person with mental health problems to seek the assistance of competent professionals. If the Assembly suspects that an individual may be in danger because of the psychological problems of a believer, the Assembly can appoint a representative to contact a social service agency or a hospital and inform the appropriate officials of its concerns.

Regarding persons whose [mental] condition has not been defined by the civil authorities after medical diagnosis, the Assembly on the spot must investigate every case that arises and, after consultation with experts, deliver its verdict. Such a verdict, however, should, in important cases, be preceded by consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly. No doubt, the power of prayer is very great, yet consultation with experts is enjoined by Baha'u'llah. Should these experts believe that an abnormal case exists, the withholding of voting rights is justified.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated May 30, 1936, to an individual believer

The withdrawal of administrative rights from a person who is suffering from a mental illness is not a sanction, but merely a recognition of the fact that the believer's condition renders him incapable of exercising those rights. From this you will see that the mental incapacity must be very serious for this step to be taken, and would normally be dependent upon a certification of insanity by medical authorities or confinement in a mental hospital. Again, depending upon the kind of mental illness, such suspension of voting rights may or may not involve non-receipt of Baha'i newsletters, inability to attend Nineteen Day Feasts, etc.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
May 12, 1982, in Lights of Guidance, p. 55, par. 195

Laws Not Presently Binding Upon the Western Believers
(See also Chapter 3, Section entitled "Removal from Assembly Membership," also this Chapter, Section entitled "limited Sanctions")

See the Appendix in this chapter.

Application of Laws to Citizens of the People's Republic of China
At this time, Baha'i laws of personal status are not binding upon citizens of the People's Republic of China.

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Special Enrollment Procedures Mainland China")

OBEDIENCE TO THE LAWS

[15.31] Importance of Obedience

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Baha'u'llah.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 66

The community of the followers of Baha'u'llah should satisfy themselves that in the eyes of the world at large and in the sight of their vigilant Master they are living witnesses of those truths which He fondly cherished and tirelessly championed to the very end of His days. If we relax in our purpose, if we falter in our faith, if we neglect the varied opportunities given us from time to time by an all-wise and gracious Master, we are not merely failing in what is our most vital and conspicuous obligation, but are thereby insensibly retarding the flow of those quickening energies which can alone insure the vigorous and speedy development of God's struggling Faith.
Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, pp. 130-31

It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult. With you, and indeed most Baha'is, who are now, as adults, accepting this glorious Faith, no doubt some of the ordinances, like fasting and daily prayer, are hard to understand and obey at first. But we must always think that these things are given to all men for a thousand years to come. For Baha'i children who see these things practiced in the home, they will be as natural and necessary a thing as going to church on Sunday was to the more pious generation of Christians. Baha'u'llah would not have given us these things if they would not greatly benefit us, and, like children who are sensible enough to realize their father is wise and does what is good for them, we must accept to obey these ordinances even though at first we may not see any need for them. As we obey them we will gradually come to see in ourselves the benefits they confer.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 16, 1949,
in Lights of Guidance, pp. 343-344, par.1150

Effect of Obedience
The soul who steadfastly obeys the laws of Baha'u'llah, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is [15.32] said to have been following a chimera: He does not attain the happiness he sought; he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.... By upholding Baha'i law in the face of all difficulties we not only strengthen our own characters but influence those around us.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 6, 1973, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

Effect of Disobedience
Again and again Baha'u'llah stressed the importance of the believers" living according to the Teachings. Whenever they fall short this not only affects their own inner lives but can test the faith of their fellow-believers and

repel those who might otherwise be drawn to the Faith.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 24, 1973, to an individual believer

Obedience Will Necessarily Impose Hardships

Obedience to the laws of Baha'u'llah will necessarily impose hardships in individual cases. No one should expect, upon becoming a Baha'i, that his faith will not be tested, and to our finite understanding of such matters these tests may occasionally seem unbearable. But we are aware of the assurance which Baha'u'llah Himself has given the believers that they will never be called upon to meet a test greater than their capacity to endure. It therefore becomes a matter of demonstration of the depth of one's faith when he is faced with a divine command the wisdom and rationale of which he cannot at that time understand.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 7, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Baha'u'llah also recognizes that human beings are fallible. He knows that, in our weakness, we shall repeatedly stumble when we try to walk in the path He has pointed out to us. If all human beings became perfect the moment they accepted the call of Baha'u'llah this world would be another world. It is in light of our frailty that 'Abdu'l-Baha appealed to the friends everywhere to love each other and stressed the emphatic teaching of Baha'u'llah that each of us should concentrate upon improving his or her own life and ignore the faults of others. How many times the Master stressed the need for unity, for without it His Father's Cause could not go forward.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 24, 1973, to an individual believer

LAWS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND GOD

[15.33] (See also Chapter 8, Section entitled "The Distinctive Baha'i Community")

There are certain laws the observance of which is solely between the individual and God. Some of these laws are:
´ Reading the Sacred Writings Daily
´ Prayer
´ Fasting
´ Huqúqu'llah

The laws are given in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. Although the laws are between the individual and God, it is the responsibility of the Local Spiritual Assembly to educate the believers about the existence of the laws and to increase their understanding and devotion to the laws.

A third requisite [for them that take counsel together] is the promulgation of the divine commandments among the friends, such as the Obligatory Prayers, Fasting, Pilgrimage, Huqúqu'llah and all the other ordinances.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Huqúqu'llah, p. 25

Read the Sacred Writings Daily

Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all.
Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, par. 149

Prayer

Prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and conducive to protection and preservation from tests.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Unrestrained As the Wind: A Life Dedicated to Baha'u'llah, p. 9

The obligatory prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face toward God and expressing devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of one's heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Spiritual Foundations:
Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude, p. 8

Fasting

As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive, and purify it, and thus ensure its steady development.

[15.34] The ordinance of fasting is, as in the case with these three prayers, a spiritual and vital obligation enjoined by Baha'u'llah upon every believer who has attained the age of 15. In the Aqdas He thus writes:

We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. He hath exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His Presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous.

And in another passage He says:

We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Ruz as a feast.... The traveler, the ailing, those who are with child or giving suck, are not bound by the Fast;...Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the Book.

Also in the "Questions and Answers" that form an appendix to the Aqdas, Baha'u'llah reveals the following:

Verily, I say that God has appointed a great station for fasting and prayer. But during good health its benefit is evident, and when one is ill, it is not permissible to fulfill them.

Concerning the age of maturity, He reveals in the appendix of that same book:

The age of maturity is fifteen for both men and women.

The fasting period, which lasts nineteen days, starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purposes are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.
Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, pp. 8-9

Exemptions from Fasting
Regarding your question concerning the Fast: Travelers are exempt from fasting, but if they want to fast while they are traveling, [15.35] they are free to do so. You are exempt the whole period of your travel, not just the hours you are in a train or car, etc. If one eats unconsciously during the fasting hours, this is not breaking the Fast as it is an accident. The age limit is seventy years, but if one desires to fast after the age limit is passed, and is strong enough to, one is free to do so. If during the Fast period a person falls ill and is unable to fast, but recovers before the fast period is over, he can start to fast again and continue until the end. Of course the Fast, as you know, can only be kept during the month set aside for that purpose.
Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #167, January 1944, p. 2

Smoking in Relation to the Fast
In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Baha, after stating that fasting consists of abstinence from food and drink, further indicates that smoking is a form of "drink." In Arabic the verb "drink" applies equally to smoking.

In the East, therefore, the friends abstain from smoking during the hours of fasting, and friends from the East living in the West do likewise. But, as stated in our letter to the National Assembly of New Zealand, this application of the divine law has not been extended to the friends in the West for the present, and therefore it should not be made an issue.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 15, 1972, to an individual believer

The Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that the prohibition of smoking as an aspect of fasting, as explained in Note 16 on page 59 of the Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas has not yet been applied in the West and therefore the friends should not make an issue of it.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 17, 1980, to an individual believer

Huququ'llah
And now, amid the eager anticipation occasioned by the two major commemorative events and by the imminent publication of the Mother Book of the Baha'i Revelation, the Law of Huququ'llah takes effect as part of the constant

practice of the members of our entire world community. May the promised divine bounties associated with the activation of this holy law be showered upon the beloved of the Lord in every land.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, Ridvan Message, dated 1992

(For more information, contact the Trustees of the Huqúqu'llah)

[15.36] Attitude Toward Payment of Huqúqu'llah
It is incumbent upon everyone to discharge the obligation of Huqúq. The advantages gained from this deed revert to the persons themselves. However, the acceptance of the offerings dependeth on the spirit of joy, fellowship and contentment that the righteous souls who fulfill this injunction will manifest. If such is the attitude acceptance is permissible, and not otherwise. Verily thy Lord is the AllSufficing, the All-Praised.
Baha'u'llah, in Huqúqu'llah, p. 2

Huqúqu'llah is indeed a great law.... It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful.
Baha'u'llah, in Huqúqu'llah, p. 3

This weighty ordinance, as testified by the Pen of Glory is invested with incalculable benefit and wisdom. It purifies one's possessions, averts loss and disaster, conduces to prosperity and honor and imparts divine increase and blessing. It is a sacrifice offered for and related to God, and an act of servitude leading to the promotion of His Cause. As affirmed by the Center of the Covenant, Huqúq offerings constitute a test for the believers and enable the friends to become firm and steadfast in faith and certitude.
The Universal House of Justice, October 25, 1970, in Huqúqu'llah, pp. 35-36

Payment of Huqúqu'llah Is Obligatory
Payment of Huqúqu'llah is a spiritual obligation binding on the people of Baha. The injunction is laid down in the Most Holy Book, and clear and conclusive explanations are embodied in various Tablets.

Every devoted believer who is able to meet the specified conditions, must pay the Huqúqu'llah, without any exception. Indeed according to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, failure to comply with this injunction is regarded as a betrayal of trust, and the divine call: "Whoso dealeth dishonestly with God will in justice be exposed," is a clear reference to such people.
The Universal House of Justice, October 25, 1970, in Huqúqu'llah, p. 35

The devoted believer who is privileged to pay "the Right of God," far from seeking excuses for evading this spiritual obligation, will do his utmost to meet it.
The Universal House of Justice, February 26, 1973, in Huqúqu'llah, p. 38

(See also Chapter 10, Section entitled "The Fund")

SUGGESTED READINGS

[15.37] The Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah

Trustworthiness: A Compilation of Extracts from the Baha'i Writings , Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1987

A Chaste and Holy Life, Shoghi Effendi

Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Baha'u'llah, Shoghi Effendi

Principles of Baha'i Administration: A Compilation, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, 1976

Prescription for Living, Ruhiyyih Rabbani

Huququ'llah, The Right of God, cassette tape available through Baha'i Distribution Service

APPENDIX
LAWS NOT CURRENTLY BINDING UPON THE WESTERN BELIEVERS

[15.38] It has become apparent from a number of questions we have received that many believers are not clear which are those laws already binding upon the Baha'is in the West. We therefore feel it is timely to clarify the situation and the simplest way is to state those laws listed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas which are not at present binding upon the friends in the western world. For ease of reference we give the numbers of the sections listed.

´ IV.A.(4)(c) The law regarding the exemption from obligatory prayer granted to women in their courses.

´ IV.A.(10) The law concerning ablutions, with the exception of the ablutions required for the Medium Obligatory Prayer which are described in Section CLXXXII of Prayers and Meditations and are required for the recitation of that prayer.

´ IV.A.(12) The law concerning actions to be taken in place of an Obligatory Prayer missed on account of insecure conditions.

´ IV.B.(5)(a) The definition of travelers for the purpose of exemption from fasting. Instead of these definitions the believers in the West should observe the following guidance given by the beloved Guardian's secretary on his behalf: "Travelers are exempt from fasting, but if they do want to fast while they are traveling, they are free to do so. You are exempt the whole period of your travel, not just the hours you are in a train or car, etc....'

´ IV.B.(5)(f) The law regarding the exemption from fasting granted to women in their courses.

´ IV.C.(1)(i) The laws governing betrothal.

´ IV.C.(1)(j) The law concerning the payment of a dowry by the groom to the bride on marriage.

´ IV.C.(1)(l) and (m) The laws concerning the traveling of a husband away from his wife.

´ IV.C.(1)(n) and (o) The laws relating to the virginity of the wife.

´ [15.39] IV.C.(2)(b) That part of the divorce law relating to fines payable to the House of Justice.

´ IV.C.(3) The law of inheritance. This is normally covered by civil laws of intestacy at the present time.
´ IV.D.(1)(a) The law of pilgrimage.
´ IV.D.(1)(b) The law of Huququ'llah is not yet applied to the Western friends. (As of Ridvan 1992, this law is now binding)
´ IV.D.(1)(d) The law of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is gradually being put into effect.
´ IV.D.(1)(f) The Baha'i Festivals are being celebrated by the western friends on their anniversaries in the Gregorian Calendar until such time as the Universal House of Justice deems it desirable to pass supplementary legislation necessary for the full implementation of the Badi" Calendar.
´ IV.D.(1)(j) The age of maturity applies only to Baha'i religious duties as yet. On other matters it is subject to the civil law of each country. The age of administrative maturity in the Baha'i community has, for the time being, been fixed at 21.
´ IV.D.(1)(k) For the burial of the dead the only requirements now binding in the West are to bury the body (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour's journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead if the deceased is a believer over the age of 15.
´ IV.D.(1)(p) The law of tithes.
´ IV.D.(1)(q) The law concerning the repetition of the Greatest Name 95 times a day.
´ IV.D.(l)(r) The law concerning the hunting of animals.
´ IV.D.(1)(t), (u), (v) and (w) The laws relating to the finding of lost property, the disposition of treasure trove, the disposal of objects held in trust and compensation for manslaughter are all designed for a future state of society. These matters are usually covered by the civil law of each country.
´ IV.D.(1)(y)(xiv), (xv), (xvi) and (xvii) Arson, adultery, murder and theft are all forbidden to Baha'is, but the punishments prescribed for them in the Kitab-i-Aqdas are designed for a future state of society. Such matters are usually covered by the civil laws of each country.
´ IV.D.(1)(y)(xxv), (xxx), (xxxi) and (xxxii) The laws prohibiting the use of the type of pools which used to [15.40] be found in Persian baths, the plunging of one's hand in food, the shaving of one's head and the growth of men's hair below the lobe of the ear.

All the exhortations, listed in section IV.D.(3) are applicable universally at the present time insofar as it is possible for the friends to implement them; for example, the exhortation to teach one's children to chant the Holy Verses in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar can be literally carried out only on a limited scale at the present time, but the friends should, nevertheless, teach their children the Holy Writings as far as possible.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 9, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly (With subsequent change indicated in parenthesis and **bold case**)

16„MARRIAGE

THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

[16.1] And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: "Marry, O people, that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants; this is one of My commandments unto you; obey it as an assistance to yourselves.'
Baha'u'llah, in Baha'i Prayers, p. 105

The true marriage of Baha'is is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Baha'i marriage.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 118

It should, moreover, be born in mind that although to be married is highly desirable, and Baha'u'llah has strongly recommended it, it is not the central purpose of life. If a person has to wait a considerable period before finding a spouse, or if ultimately, he or she must remain single, it does not mean that he or she is thereby unable to fulfill his or her life's purpose.
The Universal House of Justice,
Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973, pp. 110-11

ENGAGEMENT

Purpose of Engagement

Baha'i marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose [16.2] must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity....
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 118

A couple should study each other's character and spend time getting to know each other before they decide to marry, and when they do marry it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond.
The Universal House of Justice, November 2, 1982,
in Baha'i Marriage and Family Life, p. 20

In situations where the parents are living abroad or their whereabouts are unknown, it is advisable not to announce the engagement before the couple obtains the required consent before marriage.

95-Day Period of Engagement

(Currently Applicable Only to Persian Believers)
Concerning the question of marriage and the stipulated period between the time of the engagement and the marriage, this is the decisive text of the Book of

God and may not be interpreted. In the past, serious difficulties and problems arose when a long period of time elapsed between the engagement and the marriage. Now according to the Text of the Book, when marriage between the parties is arranged, i.e. when the parties become engaged, and it is certain that they will be married, not more than ninety-five days should elapse before the marriage takes place....
'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 11, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Applicable to Persian Believers Wherever They Reside
The law requiring Baha'is to be married within the 95-day period following an engagement is not yet applicable in the West. However, Persians residing in the West obey such laws as a matter of conscience.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 14, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Concerning the question as to how the term "Persian believer" should be defined in applying this law, you should be guided as follows. The law applies to Persian believers wherever they have established residence after leaving Iran. In cases where children born to such parents are brought up in the Persian tradition, speak Persian, and are thoroughly conversant with the laws of the Kitabi-Aqdas, they will obviously feel an obligation, and should be assisted, to observe this law as circumstances permit.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 6, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[16.3] The Iranian believers residing in western countries...should not require the western Baha'is to be bound by the same laws as are applicable to themselves, nor should they expect more of them than the pen of the beloved Guardian prescribed for them for this period.
The Universal House of Justice, July 7, 1968

Role of Local Spiritual Assembly in Enforcing the Law
The action you have taken so far in regard to enforcing laws that are binding on the Persian believers living in the West, that is, leaving it to the individual conscience to carry out these laws, with which they are familiar, is correct.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 11, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Breaking of Engagement
The breaking of an engagement, though not always desirable, does not violate the Baha'i Marriage Law.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 11, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In principle, according to the decisive text of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the period of ninety-five days should commence only when the two parties have been betrothed, and the marriage is agreed. Therefore, the breaking of an engagement, although possible, should rarely occur. The Assemblies should, when the reason for

breaking, or extending the fixed period of engagement is valid, render every assistance to the parties involved to remove their difficulties and facilitate their observance of the ordinance of the Book.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 29, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Local Assemblies are responsible for making certain that the members of their community understand both the requirements of Baha'i marriage law and the nature of the sanctions which can be imposed when the laws are violated,„(It should be noted that this is not a matter of information to be checked at the time of enrollment, but rather represents a continuing L.S.A. responsibility for deepening the Baha'i community.)
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 14, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

Local Assemblies are responsible for making certain that the members of their community understand both the requirements of Baha'i marriage law and the nature of the sanctions which can be imposed when the laws are violated,„(it should be noted that this is not a matter of information to be checked at the time of enrollment, [16.4] but rather represents a continuing L.S.A. responsibility for deepening the Baha'i community.)
The Universal House of Justice,
in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, third edition, p. 293, par. 10.12.1

Role in Upholding the Law
The members of the Local Spiritual Assembly must themselves understand the basic requirements of the Baha'i marriage law. These are:
´ consent of both parties
´ consent of parents
´ performance of a Baha'i ceremony under the prior authorization of an Assembly
´ removal of administrative rights if the laws are broken

Breaches of the Baha'i law of marriage are often due to the believers" ignorance of or misinformation about either the substance of the Baha'i law or its importance and presently binding requirements. Local Spiritual Assemblies play a vital role in preventing the development of these situations. An Assembly should not assume that all of the friends in its community are aware of the Baha'i marriage law. As opportunities arise, whether at the Nineteen Day Feast or at community deepenings, the Assembly should familiarize the friends with the basic requirements of the Baha'i marriage law.

Counseling and Guidance
All Baha'is who wish to marry must first contact a Local Spiritual Assembly. It is not possible to have a Baha'i marriage ceremony without an Assembly's prior authorization. When a couple asks an Assembly to arrange a Baha'i ceremony for them, the Assembly may wish to request a meeting with its representatives to

review with them the Baha'i Writings on marriage and to impress upon them the importance of the step they are about to take. This session should be both a serious and happy occasion and help them understand the permanent nature of their commitment to each other.

The Local Spiritual Assembly does not have the responsibility to approve or disapprove of the marriage or to discourage the couple from marrying if it does not feel the parties are compatible. If one or both parties should ask for the Assembly's advice, however, it may be given freely.

The Assembly's representatives may wish to review the following publications with the couple:
A Fortress for Well-Being
Baha'i Marriage and Family Life
Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 19681973, pp. 105-12

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Suggested Readings")

[16.5] Ensuring that Baha'i and Civil Marriage Requirements Are Fulfilled
The obligation of the Spiritual Assembly is to ascertain that all the requirements of civil and Baha'i law have been complied with, and, having done so, the Assembly may neither refuse to perform the marriage ceremony nor delay it.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 30, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Baha'i marriage ceremonies are legal in all 50 states. The Assembly representative who signs the civil license is typically the chair or the secretary.

When a marriage is planned, the Assembly should ask to be informed far enough in advance so that it can review and approve the parental consent and ensure that arrangements for the Baha'i ceremony are in conformity with Baha'i principles and the requirements of civil law. If difficulties arise in obtaining consent, the Assembly should lend whatever help it can.

Witnesses
These two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Spiritual Assembly, but must in any case be acceptable to the Assembly; they may be its chairman and secretary, or two members of the Assembly, or two other people, Baha'i or non-Baha'i, or any combination of these....

The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed. This fact makes it possible for a lone pioneer in a remote post to have a Baha'i marriage.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In considering the acceptability of the witnesses the Assembly must be satisfied as to their reliability. Pertinent to this is the reply given by

Baha'u'llah when asked for a definition of the qualifications of those who may be called upon to give testimony or bear witness. His reply was that a witness must be of "good reputation among men," and "the testimony of followers of any faith is acceptable to God.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 2, 1976, to an individual believer

Reporting Cases of Violation to the National Spiritual Assembly

If a believer marries after becoming a Baha'i and knows the Baha'i law but does not fulfill its requirements, he is subject to possible removal of administrative rights. The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for handling the case and for reporting the facts and its recommendation to the National Assembly.

[16.6] (See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Violations of Baha'i Marriage Law'; Chapter 15, Sections entitled "Nature and Purpose of Baha'i Law" and "The Role of the Local Spiritual Assembly in Upholding Baha'i Law")

A Checklist for Baha'i Marriage
1. Be certain that the Baha'is being married are registered Baha'is in good standing. If a Baha'i is unknown to the Assembly, ask to see the person's membership card. If the person does not have a card or there is a question about membership status, call or write to the National Spiritual Assembly. Baha'is who are deprived of their administrative rights may not have a Baha'i ceremony. A Baha'i in good standing may not marry a Baha'i without administrative rights. (See also Section entitled "Restoration of Administrative Rights„Having a Baha'i Ceremony")

2. Be satisfied that parental consent (whether written or oral) has been freely given. This information should come from a third party.

3. If either of the parties has been married before, make sure that a Baha'i divorce was granted if they were Baha'is at the time of the divorce.

4. Appoint witnesses. The two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Assembly, but must be acceptable to the Assembly.

5. When a second, non-Baha'i ceremony is to be performed, make sure that both ceremonies will be held on the same Gregorian day. The ceremonies may not be combined.

6. If the Baha'i ceremony is to be the legal one, be certain that the civil license is in hand. Make sure that all requirements for civil law (i.e., blood tests, etc.) have been met.

7. If the Baha'i ceremony is the legal one, sign and mail the civil license to the County Clerk or other designated civil official soon after the ceremony. Make sure it is sent before the deadline.

8. Issue a Baha'i marriage certificate to the couple immediately after the ceremony.

9. Fill out and mail, within a few days after the ceremony has been held, a Baha'i Membership Data Report to the National Spiritual Assembly (attn: Management Information Systems), certifying that the marriage has taken place. Include name [16.7] and address changes, if applicable. A form is to be sent for each person.

OBTAINING CONSENT

Purpose of Consent

Baha'u'llah has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Baha'i marriage.... This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 25, 1947, and quoted by the Universal House of Justice in its letter dated December 11, 1973, to an individual believer

You will note that the aspect of protecting the child from making the wrong decision is not mentioned in any...quotations as a reason for the law, although it may well play a part in the parents" decision as they have the obligation to consider the welfare and happiness of their children at all times. However limited our understanding of this and other laws given us by Baha'u'llah, we are assured that the divine blessings await those who place their reliance in Him and obey His commandments.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 19, 1972, to two believers

It hath been laid down in the Bayan that marriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancor should arise amongst them.
Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, par. 65

Consent Requirements

As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee, then the matter is subject to the consent of father and mother. Before thou makest thy choice, they have no right to interfere.
'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 118

About the consent of parents for marriage; this is required before and also after the man or woman is twenty-one years of age. It is also required in the event of a second marriage, after the dissolution of the first whether through death or through divorce.

The parental consent is also a binding obligation irrespective of whether the parents are Baha'is or not, whether they are friendly [16.8] or opposed to the Cause. In the event of the death of both parents, the consent of a guardian is not required.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated October 10, 1936, to an individual believer

In many cases of breach of marriage laws the believers apparently look upon the law requiring consent of parents before marriage as a mere administrative regulation, and do not seem to realize that this is a law of great importance affecting the very foundations of human society. Moreover they seem not to appreciate that in the Baha'i Faith the spiritual and administrative aspects are complementary and that the social laws of the Faith are as binding as the purely spiritual ones.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 29, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Role of the Local Spiritual Assembly
With reference to the matter of the consent of the parents to a Baha'i marriage; as this is a vital binding obligation, it is the duty of the Assemblies to ascertain, before giving their sanction, that the consent obtained has been given freely by the parents themselves.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, pp. 13-14

We must recognize that Baha'u'llah established institutions which are the bulwark of His World Order. One of these is the Local Spiritual Assembly which, amongst its other responsibilities, is called upon to administer the laws governing marriage. Although it is not necessary to obtain "permission" to marry from the Assembly, there are certain requirements which must be met before a Baha'i marriage can take place, such as presentation to and acceptance by the Assembly of consent of all living natural parents and whatever civil documents, if any, are necessary according to local law.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 2, 1976, to an individual believer

Ideally, announcements and plans for marriage should not be made until the required consents have been obtained.

Manner of Giving Consent
While it is desirable to have a signed consent from each parent it is not a requirement under Baha'i Law. The responsible Spiritual Assembly must satisfy itself that consents are freely given but it should not insist upon a signed document. Reliable [16.9] evidence of oral consents is quite sufficient; some parents freely give their consents orally while refusing to write their consents.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, letter dated April 11, 1978, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1253

Should the parents in their letter of consent, as you indicated, not name a specific future spouse, the House of Justice states that it could be accepted and it would be permissible to perform a Baha'i marriage ceremony on the basis of such a letter.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,

letter dated October 9, 1975, to an individual believer

For evidence on oral consent to marriage to be deemed reliable it should only be accepted from a third party.

Consent Is Given for the Marriage Itself
If it had been understood that Baha'i law requires parental consent to marriage and not to the Baha'i ceremony, Mrs.... consent might have been asked for in such way as not have incurred her displeasure. The request could have been quite casual without her son's even mentioning that he has to have it to fulfill a requirement of Baha'i law.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 16, 1981, to an individual believer

It is not essential that the parents of the prospective bride and groom know that either of the parties is a Baha'i, nor is it necessary for them to give consent to the Baha'i ceremony. It is sufficient if the parents give consent to the marriage itself. However, Baha'is may not dissimulate their faith and if the parents ask about their religion they should not hesitate to say that they are Baha'i.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 23, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It should be understood that consent to marriage is all that is required from a parent. It is not necessary that the parents consent to a Baha'i ceremony. However, if the reason the parent refuses to give consent is the fact that the parties propose to have a Baha'i ceremony, then the marriage cannot take place.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 24, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Consent Required in Case of Remarriage
In all cases of marriage, including remarriage, Baha'is are required to have consent of all living parents of both parties.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 29, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[16.10] Consent Required if a Baha'i Marries a non-Baha'i
Regarding the question whether it is necessary to obtain the consent of the parents of a non-Baha'i participant in a marriage with a Baha'i: as Baha'u'llah has stated that the consent of the parents of both parties is required in order to promote unity and avoid friction, and as the Aqdas does not specify any exceptions to this rule, the Guardian feels that under all circumstances the consent of the parents of both parties is required.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 13

This [requirement of consent] applies whether the parents are Baha'is or non-Baha'is, divorced for years or not.
Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, published in "U.S. Baha'i News,"
No. 202, dated December 1947, p. 2)

Consent Must be Unrestricted, Unconditioned

Basically, Baha'i law pertaining to marriage requires that the parties intending to marry must obtain consent of all living natural parents. Further, the responsibility of the parents in giving their consent is unrestricted and unconditioned, but in discharging this duty they are responsible for their decision to God.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
letter dated October 9, 1975, to an individual believer

If the consent of the...[parent] is obtained, your Assembly must make certain that such consent was freely given and not conditioned by the fact that the marriage already existed.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 8, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Contacting Parents

Parents Residing Outside the Continental United States

In many instances, Baha'is or their prospective non-Baha'i mates have parents who reside outside the continental United States. In the past, parental consent had to be verified by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country in which the parents live and transmitted by that Assembly to the United States National Spiritual Assembly.

At this time, when consent is given in writing, the National Assembly considers the letter itself to be sufficient evidence of approval. No further verification is required.

Parents Can Change Their Mind

Concerning...consent to her daughter's marriage: this must be given in order to be a Baha'i Marriage. Baha'u'llah requires this and makes no provision about a parent changing his or her mind. So they are free to do so. Once the written consent is [16.11] given and the marriage takes place, the parents have no right to interfere any more.

Letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated June 15, 1954,
to a National Spiritual Assembly in Messages to Canada, p. 47

When Dangerous to Contact

In the case of parents who live in Iran or other countries where the Faith is restricted, it may be dangerous to attempt contact. However, it is still vital that consent be obtained. In situations of this kind, the assistance of other administrative bodies may become necessary. Please contact the National Spiritual Assembly for advice on how to proceed.

Whereabouts Unknown

Since there is evidence to presume that his father is alive, there is no alternative but for Mr.... to continue efforts to locate the father through all avenues of investigation which may be open to him, including advertising. The investigation should continue until the only reasonable conclusion which can be reached is that the father is dead.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated March 18, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If the whereabouts of the parents is not known legally, in other words, if they are legally dead, then it is not necessary for the children to obtain their consent, obviously. It is not a question of the child not knowing the present whereabouts of its parents, it is a question of a legal thing„if the parents are alive they must be asked.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Messages to Canada, pp. 59-60

You must make every effort to ascertain the names and whereabouts of your natural parents, including contacting persons, firms or agencies, and advertising in newspapers. If the search proves fruitless and the Assembly is satisfied that every reasonable avenue of search has been exhausted it may conclude that the parents be presumed deceased and their consent is not obtainable.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
letter dated April 12, 1981, to an individual believer

If you are satisfied that Mr.... has exhausted all reasonable possibilities of locating his father, you may consider that the father is legally dead and that he is therefore excused from obtaining his father's consent.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 27, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[16.12] Locating Parents
Reasonable avenues to try to locate the missing parent(s) may include advertising and contacting the police and other government agencies, such as the Social Security Administration or the state Bureau of Child Support Enforcement. If the missing parent was known to have a problem with alcohol, the Salvation Army may be helpful. Friends and relatives of the missing parent are usually the most valuable resources to be explored. Some possible avenues:
1 Write the person in care of his or her last known address, with "address correction requested" on the envelope.

2. Write to the postmaster or Post Office for any forwarding address the person might have left. The cost is minimal.

3. Check the phone book. If unsuccessful, call directory assistance.

4. Social Security, the Veterans" Administration, Railroad Retirement, or the Secretary of State's office will forward a letter under certain conditions. While the Social Security Agency will not release a person's address, it may be willing to forward a letter to the person.

5. Place a personal want ad in the paper or papers where it might be seen by the parent or by the parent's friends. The library has books listing the names and addresses of newspapers in different cities.

6. An agency that often is willing to help is the Salvation Army. Contact the local Salvation Army Missing Persons Office.

(See also Chapter 6 Appendix, "Suggestions for Verifying Addresses of Mail

Returns")

Identity Unknown or Uncertain
If the assumed natural father denies that he is the father of the child the following principles apply: if his name appears on the birth certificate of the child and if the law of the country presumes that the name on the birth certificate is that of the father, then he should be considered as the father for the purpose of obtaining consent. If the name of the father given on the birth certificate is not a conclusive presumption of parenthood and if the man in question has always denied that he is the father of the child, the child is not required to seek the consent of this man unless it has been legally established that he is the father notwithstanding his denial.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 24, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Abandonment
In the case of an abandoned child, if the abandonment really means that the baby has been left to be discovered by other [16.13] people, it is obviously impossible to trace the parents. If, however, either parent is known and there are no legal barriers in the way, consent should be sought.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 6, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Ties Severed by Adoption
Regarding the matter of adopted children, the consent of all natural parents must be obtained wherever this is legally possible but no effort should be made to trace the natural parents if this contravenes the provisions of the adoption certificate or the laws of the country.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 24, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is not enough to surmise that it is forbidden to trace the natural parents; it must actually be determined that such is the case. Otherwise, the child must make an effort to locate the natural parent or parents and obtain their consent.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 16, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The House of Justice has also ruled that where, in signing the documents giving her child for adoption, a mother has agreed that she would be permanently deprived of her rights as parent or guardian and has no right to see the child, get in touch with him or have him returned to her, she has, in the eyes of the Baha'i law, disowned her child and her consent for his marriage is not required. This would also apply in the case of a natural father.

This...is quite distinct from the situation where parents have had their children fostered by another family by an agreement under which they do not give up their rights and obligations as natural parents. Under such a situation the consent of the natural parents would be required.

In no circumstances can the responsibility for giving or withholding consent for marriage be transferred to the foster parents.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 18, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Consent of Foster Parents
Concerning the situation where parents have had their children fostered by another family by an agreement under which they do not give up their rights and obligations as natural parents. Under such a situation the consents of the natural parents would be required. In no circumstances can the responsibility for giving or [16.14] withholding consent for marriage be transferred to the foster parents.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 18, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is the consent of the natural parents that is required for marriage. Consent from foster parents is not a requirement of existing Baha'i law, although, of course, there is no objection to a child asking his foster parents for consent, if he so wishes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 28, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Consent of Adopted Parents
Consent of adopted parents is not necessary to Baha'i marriage although there is no objection at all to their giving it if the parties concerned so desire.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 6, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

When Consent is Withheld
Refusal to Give Consent
The validity of a Baha'i marriage is dependent upon the free and full consent of all four parents. The freedom of the parents in the exercise of this right is unrestricted and unconditioned. They may refuse their consent on any ground, and they are responsible for their decision to God alone.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated March 19, 1938, to an individual believer

If any one of the parents refuses to give his or her consent for any reason, including the fact that a Baha'i ceremony is to be carried out, then the marriage cannot take place.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is perfectly true that Baha'u'llah's statement that the consent of all living parents is required for marriage places a grave responsibility on each parent. When the parents are Baha'is they should, of course, act objectively in withholding or granting their approval. They cannot evade this responsibility by merely acquiescing in their child's wish, nor should they be swayed by prejudice; but, whether they be Baha'i or non-Baha'i, the parents" decision is binding, whatever the reason that may have motivated it. Children must

recognize and understand that this act of consenting is the duty of a parent. They must have respect in their hearts for those who have given them life, and whose good pleasure they must at all times strive to win.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 1, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[16.15] Baha'is who cannot marry because of lack of consent of one or more parents could consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly, to see whether it may suggest a way to change the attitude of any of the parents involved. The believers, when faced with such problems, should put their trust in Baha'u'llah, devote more time to the service, the teaching and the promotion of His Faith, be absolutely faithful to His injunctions on the observance of an unsullied, chaste life, and rely upon Him to open the way and remove the obstacle, or make known His will.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 9, 1969, to an individual believer

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Consent Is Given for the Marriage Itself")

Consent Withheld Because of Prejudice
We have given very thoughtful consideration to your letter of August 26, 1965, reporting several incidents in which parental consent to marriage has been withheld by parents allegedly on grounds of racial prejudice. While we have the greatest sympathy for the individuals involved in these unfortunate circumstances, we can reach no other conclusion but that consent of parents must be obtained in all of these cases before marriage can take place.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 7, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

All too often nowadays such consent for marriage is withheld by non-Baha'i parents for reasons of bigotry or racial prejudice; yet we have seen again and again the profound effect on those very parents of the firmness of the children in the Baha'i law, to the extent that not only is the consent ultimately given in many cases, but the character of the parents can be affected and their relationship with their child greatly strengthened.

Thus, by upholding Baha'i law in the face of all difficulties we not only strengthen our own characters but influence those around us.
The Universal House of Justice,
Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 107

Refusal to Approve or Disapprove
We have your letter of May 10, 1968 requesting guidance on the question of obtaining consent of parents to marriage in a case in which parents refuse to approve or disapprove.

The Baha'i law on this subject is clear: the consent of parents [16.16] must be obtained before the marriage can take place. The refusal of the parents to make a decision has the same effect, in this case, as refusal to give consent. Only

if the parents later decide to give consent can the Baha'i marriage be performed.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Circumstances Under Which Parental Consents Not Required
The only circumstances under which parental consent for Baha'i marriage is not required are the following:
1. If the parent is dead.
2. If the parent has absented himself to the degree that he can be adjudged legally dead.
3. If the parent is certified insane and therefore legally incompetent to give consent.
4. If the parent is a Covenant-breaker.
5. It is possible under Baha'i Law, in certain very rare cases, to recognize that a state of disownment exists....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 30, 1971

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Disownment/Removal of Parental Rights")

Strictly speaking, the only instance of a parent's consent not being required for the marriage of a Baha'i is when that parent is certified insane and is therefore incapable of exercising any judgment in the matter. All other apparent exceptions are really cases in which the parent is no longer considered to exist as such, either in fact when he is dead, or in point of law such as when he is untraceable to the degree that he may be accounted legally dead, or when the child has been adopted and the law of the land prohibits any attempt to trace or contact the natural parents, or certain rare cases in Baha'i Law such as Covenant-breaking when the child is authorized to disown his parent, for example. The various other grounds that you mention, i.e. a parent's moral unworthiness, the fact that he has forsaken his family, or the refusal of consent for base motives do not exempt the children from the requirement of obtaining parent consent.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 10, 1968, to an individual believer

[16.17] Mental Incapacity
The Guardian feels therefore, that you must secure your Mother's approval, before marriage, unless the Doctor certifies that she is incapable of making a decision.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated June 21, 1954, to an individual believer

If the father should be found but it is determined and certified that he is mentally incapable of giving consent, then obviously no consent is necessary.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 18, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

With reference to the reported condition of the prospective groom's father, his

consent must be obtained despite a state of senility or total illiteracy. However, should the father be medically certified as mentally incompetent his consent to the marriage would not be required.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 28, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Disownment/Removal of Parental Rights
It is possible for a parent to disown his children, and if your Assembly finds that a parent has done so in accordance with the laws, customs and practices of the people of the area in which the parent resides...then no consent is required.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 18, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In case of a parent who abandons his family and disappears without a trace or support, this does not constitute disowning a child. Every effort should be made to trace the parent and secure consent for marriage. If, however, the Assembly is satisfied that every avenue of search has been exhausted and the missing parent has not been found, the marriage can take place.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

All cases of possible disownment are to first be referred to the National Spiritual Assembly by the Local Spiritual Assembly handling the case.

Baha'u'llah has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward their children, and he has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means of pleasing God himself. However, [16.18] He has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. It has been decided for the present that all cases should be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving consent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as consequence of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from flagrant sexual abuse.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 24, 1993, to an individual believer

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Ties Severed by Adoption")

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

A Baha'i marriage ceremony must have the full knowledge and authorization of a Local Spiritual Assembly. An Assembly's authorization is required, regardless of whether or not the Baha'i ceremony is to be the legal one. Since Baha'i marriage law requires that every Baha'i who is getting married must have a Baha'i marriage ceremony with the authorization of an Assembly, all Baha'is

planning to marry are strongly encouraged to contact an Assembly to request a Baha'i ceremony and to give the Assembly a reasonable period of time to ensure that the Baha'i marriage requirements are met. Failing to give an Assembly adequate time to fulfill its responsibilities may lead to delay in the wedding ceremony.

Requirements of Baha'i Law
New Believers Who Are Already Married
New believers who are already married...are not required to have a Baha'i ceremony. They are already married in the sight of the Baha'i community. There is no objection to such a couple having friends in for readings about marriage and/or prayers for their marriage.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 12, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Reaffirmation of Marriage Vows")

Marriage of Two Baha'is
The instructions of the beloved Guardian are clear on this point. When two Baha'is are married they may not be married by the religious ceremony of another Faith.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[16.19] When two Baha'is are marrying, the wedding ceremony should not be held in the place of worship of another religion, nor should the forms of marriage of other religions be added to the simple Baha'i ceremony.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
letter dated March 2, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If the parents of a Baha'i couple are, for example, Christians, there is no objection to their attending church with their parents and their parents" friends and relations, if their parents so wish, in order to pray for the future of the marriage, but such attendance should not involve any form of marriage ceremony or simulated marriage ceremony.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 19, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Marriage of a Baha'i to a non-Baha'i
It is only when a non-Baha'i partner is involved that a Baha'i may participate in the religious ceremony of the non-Baha'i partner.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a Baha'i marries a non-Baha'i who wishes to have the religious ceremony of his own sect carried out, it must be quite clear that, first, the Baha'i partner is understood to be a Baha'i by religion, and not to accept the religion of the other party to the marriage through having his or her religious ceremony; and, second, the ceremony must be of a nature which does not commit the Baha'i to any declaration of faith in a religion other than his own.

When Two Ceremonies Are Held
Under these circumstances, the Baha'i can partake of the religious ceremony of his non-Baha'i partner. The Baha'i should insist on having the Baha'i ceremony carried out before or after the nonBaha'i one, on the same day.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated June 20, 1954

When a Baha'i is marrying a non-Baha'i, and the religious wedding ceremony of the non-Baha'i partner is to be held in addition to the Baha'i ceremony, both ceremonies may, if requested, be held in the place of worship of the other religion provided that:
´ Equal respect is accorded to both ceremonies. In other words, the Baha'i ceremony, which is basically so simple, should not be regarded as a mere formal adjunct to the ceremony of the other religion.
´ [16.20] The two ceremonies are clearly distinct. In other words, they should not be commingled into one combined ceremony.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 3, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

As long as both the Baha'i and the other religious (whatever it may be) ceremony are both performed prior to the consummation of the marriage, we do not mind which ceremony is performed first. It should be left to the individuals concerned to decide among themselves.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, August 9, 1945, in Dawn of a New Day , p. 113

As to the holding of the Baha'i and civil marriage ceremonies on the same day, as the consummation of the marriage should not take place until both ceremonies have been held, a night should not intervene between the two ceremonies.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 23, 1971,
in Handbook for Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia, p. 55

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Consummation of the Marriage")

Marriage of Two Non-Baha'is
From the Baha'i standpoint it is permissible for Local Assemblies to witness marriages between two non-Baha'is provided that all the requirements of Baha'i law governing marriage have been met.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 30, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

According to current information, in the following states, at least one of the partners to the marriage must be a Baha'i if the marriage is to be legally recognized:

Delaware, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

In these states, marriages between two non-Baha'is may be performed by the Local Spiritual Assembly as long as another marriage ceremony, legally recognized by the state, is performed on the same day. It may be helpful to contact the County Clerk's Office (Marriage License Division) and/or contact

the State Legislators Office to obtain up-to-date information on the validity of Baha'i marriage between two non-Baha'is.

Reaffirmation of Marriage Vows

In all these cases, because the union is accepted by the Faith there is no question of a couple's having a Baha'i wedding ceremony [16.21] subsequently because, as the Guardian says, "Baha'i marriage is something you perform when you are going to be united for the first time, not long after the union takes place." If, however, such a couple would like to have a meeting of their friends at which Baha'i prayers and readings are said on behalf of their marriage now that they are Baha'is, there is no objection to their doing so, although it must be understood that this does not constitute a Baha'i marriage ceremony.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 23, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Baha'i ceremony is something that takes place at the time the parties are first married and not something that occurs long afterwards. Therefore, persons who were married prior to becoming Baha'is should not have a Baha'i ceremony after they have enrolled in the Faith.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 23, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

When a Civil Ceremony Is Required

The matter of regularizing a situation in civil law is quite separate and largely depends upon the requirements of the law. If a couple whose union is recognized by the Faith but is not valid in civil law wish to have a civil marriage, they may most certainly do so. This is purely a rectification of the civil position and does not require the holding of a Baha'i marriage ceremony.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 23, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

This guidance applies, for example, when:

´ a couple obtains a civil divorce and then reconciles before the completion of their year of waiting and the granting of their Baha'i divorce.

´ Iranian Baha'is married in Iran without benefit of civil marriage wish to legalize their marriage in the United States. (Because the Baha'i Faith is not recognized as a valid religion in Iran and is viewed by the authorities as heretical, Baha'is are not allowed to marry in a civil ceremony. Consequently their marriages are not recognized by the Iranian government.)

Nature of The Ceremony

There is no ritual, according to the Aqdas, the Guardian is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony should be as simple as possible, the parties using the words ordained by Baha'u'llah [16.22] and excerpts from the writings and prayers being read, if desired. There should be no commingling of the old forms with the new and simple one of Baha'u'llah, and Baha'is should not be married in the church or any other acknowledged place of worship of the followers of other

faiths.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, The Baha'i Community, pp. 43-44

An Assembly has the overriding duty to protect the good name of the Faith in relation to any activity of the friends, but it should always exercise great care not to restrict the individual's freedom of action unnecessarily. Normally the size of the wedding celebration, the place in which it is to be held and who is to be invited are all left entirely to the discretion of the bride and groom and an Assembly should interpose an objection only if it is quite certain that the Cause will really be injured if it does not do so.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 20, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Marriage Vow
The bride and groom, before two witnesses, must state "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The sincerity with which the sacred verse is spoken is a matter for the consciences of those who utter it. According to the explicit text of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, both the bride and groom must, in the presence of witnesses, recite the prescribed verse; this is an essential requirement of the marriage ceremony. Thus if a Baha'i is marrying a non-Baha'i and this person for any reason refuses to utter this verse, then the Baha'i cannot marry that person.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
May 23, 1985, in Lights of Guidance, 1988 edition, p. 385

The Reception: Serving Alcoholic Beverages
No Baha'i should serve alcohol at any function or reception given by him, such as a wedding reception or a party to which a number of people are invited.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 31, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Consummation of the Marriage
The consummation of marriage by a couple is, as you aptly state, an intimate and private matter outside the scrutiny of others. While consummation normally implies a sexual relationship, the Baha'i law requiring consummation to take place within twenty-four hours of the ceremony can be considered as fulfilled if the [16.23] couple has commenced cohabitation with the intention of setting up the family relationship.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 28, 1978, to a National Spiritual Assembly

VIOLATIONS OF BAHA'I MARRIAGE LAW

When Unnecessary to Correct Violation
Ignorance of the Law
At the present stage in the development of the Baha'i community, Baha'is who failed to have a Baha'i marriage through ignorance of the law are in a

different category altogether from those who willingly broke the law.... The former should be treated in the same manner as those Baha'is who married before they entered the Faith and those Baha'is who married without a Baha'i ceremony before the law was applied: They should be considered married and not be required to have a Baha'i ceremony.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 20, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In considering matters of this sort the beloved Guardian has instructed that each case must be considered on its own merits, and that a decision in one case is not to act as precedent in another. Hence, in this case, if your Assembly determines that Mr.... and Miss...did not clearly understand that Baha'i law requiring consent of parents applies to civil as well as Baha'i marriage, you could decide not to impose sanctions. On the other hand, if it should be found that Baha'i law was known and clearly understood and that the violation was deliberate, a different decision would be indicated.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 9, 1963, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If the Assembly has reason to suspect that the person concerned was ignorant of Baha'i Law it will wish to investigate this fact before applying sanctions.... This should not involve unreasonable delay, especially if the Assembly is unable to evoke any response from the offender.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If you are satisfied that this lady was ignorant of the Baha'i law in the sense of not really understanding it you may take the decision not to apply sanctions.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 19, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Correcting Conscious Violations
When a person has knowingly violated the Baha'i marriage law by marrying without a Baha'i ceremony, the violation may be [16.24] corrected in one of two ways:
1. Holding a belated Baha'i ceremony or
2. Obtaining a civil divorce

Wherever possible, the person is urged to have a Baha'i ceremony within a reasonable period of time to avoid the removal of membership rights.

Having a Belated Ceremony
Where, for example, the only offense is that no Baha'i ceremony took place, it may be possible to contact the couple concerned and arrange for the early celebration of the Baha'i marriage, and thus avoid the necessity of depriving them of their voting rights. But such a delay between the ascertainment of the offense...and the imposition of sanctions should not extend into months, and certainly not into years.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

A civil marriage ceremony itself is not contrary to Baha'i law, therefore if the...[parent's] consent is obtained,...the dissolution of the civil marriage would not be required.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 8, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Obtaining a Civil Divorce
If a Baha'i has married without a Baha'i ceremony, after becoming a Baha'i, and then dissolves this marriage by divorce, there is no question of requiring a Baha'i divorce or observance of a year of waiting, because there was, in Baha'i law, no recognized marriage.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Restoration of Administrative Rights")

Removal of Administrative Rights
Conscious Violation of Marriage Law
As soon as the Assembly has evidence satisfying it that a breach of Baha'i Marriage Law has been committed, and if it is satisfied that the party concerned knew the law, it should not delay deprivation of voting rights beyond a reasonable time. It does not have to wait for a response from the offender.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The sanction of withdrawal of voting rights is the greatest punishment which a National Assembly may impose upon a believer [16.25] and for that reason it should not be exercised unless it is clear that the believer with full knowledge of the laws involved deliberately violated them. Each case should be considered individually and on its own merits.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 19, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

One who knows about the existence of the law should not be excused from obeying it because it is inconvenient to have a Baha'i marriage or because he cannot obtain consent of parents.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 19, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The principle that an Assembly should repeatedly warn an offender to correct his ways before it deprives him of his voting rights applies to such continuing offenses as flagrant immorality, or membership in non-Baha'i religious organizations. It cannot be applied in the same way to a one-time offense such as a breach of Baha'i marriage laws.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In upholding the Baha'i marriage law, it is important to keep in mind that

every effort should be made to help the person correct his violation so that the removal of membership rights, which carries heavy spiritual penalties, can be avoided.

If a person does not correct the violation of the law by having a belated Baha'i ceremony or by applying for a civil divorce within a reasonable period of time (usually 30-60 days), the Assembly should promptly recommend that the National Spiritual Assembly remove the person's voting rights.

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Handling Violations of Baha'i Law")

If Parents Condone or Encourage Disregard of the Law

In connection with your question regarding the case of Mr. and Mrs.... and their daughter, the Guardian considers that your Assembly did quite right to deprive all three of their voting rights. Their conduct in carrying out a Moslem marriage in the circumstances set forth by you in your letter, and contrary to Baha'i law, are most reprehensible, to say the least, and if such actions are not strongly censured by the Baha'is, other friends may be encouraged in moments of weakness to err.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated March 10, 1951, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[16.26] Normally the responsibility to have the Baha'i ceremony held on the same day devolves upon the Baha'i participant, but if the parents are Baha'is and are found to be responsible for condoning or encouraging a disregard of Baha'i marriage laws, they become equally subject to any application of sanctions.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Evading Baha'i Law

We note the case in which believers have evidently attempted to withdraw from the Faith in an effort to evade the Baha'i law requiring consent of parents. This, of course should not be permitted and such believers are subject to administrative expulsion (i.e., loss of voting rights) on the same basis as if they had not made that attempt.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 7, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a believer who did not like a particular law were to be permitted to leave the community to break the law, and then rejoin with impunity, this would make a mockery of the Law of God.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 15, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 6, Section entitled "Withdrawing to Avoid Baha'i Law")

Restoration of Administrative Rights

When Remarriage is Possible

1. The National Assembly must be satisfied that the believer truly repents for having violated the laws of Baha'u'llah.

2. That all living parents consent to the marriage and that the consent is freely given and not conditioned on the fact that the parties are already living in a married relationship.
3. That there be a Baha'i ceremony. For this purpose the National Assembly should restore voting rights immediately before the Baha'i ceremony and on condition that it takes place.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 29, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

General Guidelines
In all cases of application for restoration of membership rights, the Assembly should be satisfied that the person has corrected the violation which caused the removal of rights. When a Baha'i, deprived of rights for violation of the marriage law, applies for reinstatement, he must be able to correct the violation either by having [16.27] a Baha'i marriage ceremony or by obtaining a civil divorce. Each case must be evaluated according to its own merits.

Also, in most cases, the Assembly must be satisfied that the offender sincerely is repentant. In some cases, rectifying the error can be held to constitute repentance. If the Assembly is satisfied that all the necessary conditions exist for restoration of administrative rights, the Assembly should recommend to the National Spiritual Assembly that the person's administrative rights be restored.

Expressing Repentance
If the voting rights have been removed justifiably it is generally sufficient for the believer to take the necessary actions to have them restored; his application for restoration and compliance with the requirements of Baha'i law are sufficient evidence of repentance.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 21, 1976, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In all cases of application for restoration of voting rights your Assembly should satisfy itself that the believer is sincerely repentant of his act of disobedience„not merely that he regrets the unhappy condition he is in and wishes to re-enter the Baha'i Community.
Letter form the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 8, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Should...apply for restoration of his voting rights, and should your Assembly feel that he is truly repentant, you should offer assistance in arranging the other details including helping him to obtain the consents of parents.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 18, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Having a Baha'i Ceremony
On the Local Spiritual Assembly's recommendation, the National Assembly will authorize the Assembly to restore the individual's administrative rights immediately before the Baha'i marriage ceremony takes place.

If the Baha'i involved can satisfy your Assembly of sincere repentance and the living parents are prepared to give their consent, the rectification of the breach of law can be made by having a Baha'i marriage ceremony.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 23, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

When the having of a Baha'i marriage ceremony is one of the conditions of the restoration of voting rights the marriage [16.28] should take place immediately after the restoration of the rights which are restored on condition that the marriage does take place. This is because a Baha'i without voting rights cannot have a Baha'i marriage.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 24, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

A delayed Baha'i marriage, conducted for reasons of fulfillment of Baha'i law and in the full spirit of the Baha'i ceremony should not be viewed as a mockery but as the confirmation of a union contracted outside Baha'i law.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 27, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In cases involving only the civil ceremony, voting rights may be restored if the Assembly feels that the believers are truly repentant and wish to comply with the Baha'i law previously broken. The civil marriage ceremony itself is not contrary to Baha'i law, and therefore the dissolution of the civil marriage is not required if the parents gave their consent. If prior consent of the parents was not obtained, the Baha'i ceremony may still take place if the parents give their consent to the marriage and the Assembly is satisfied that the consent has been genuinely and freely given and is not conditioned by the fact that the parties have already had a civil ceremony. In such cases the Assembly would restore voting rights immediately before the Baha'i ceremony on condition that it be performed.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 27, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Obtaining a Civil Divorce
Inasmuch as Mrs.... married after she was a Baha'i and without the benefit of a Baha'i marriage, she is not regarded as married under Baha'i law. Therefore no Baha'i divorce is required, and consequently the year of waiting is not required. Under these circumstances, when she obtains a civil divorce and upon finding by your National Assembly that she is repentant for having violated Baha'i law, you are free to restore her voting rights.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 15, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In order to have his voting rights returned, your Assembly would have to determine whether he is truly repentant, and whether or not he has taken any steps to correct the error in violation of Baha'i [16.29] law. In the case of a vow contrary to Baha'i principles, this would involve dissolution of the bonds of marriage.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 3, 1963, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If Mr.... participated in the religious ceremony of another faith, the question of denial or concealment of his faith, or the undertaking of a vow contrary to Baha'i principles may enter in. If a Baha'i denies his faith, conceals it or undertakes a vow contrary to Baha'i principles, restoration of his voting rights is dependent upon his repairing the wrong. If the marriage was dependent upon any of the foregoing, he must also divorce.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 8, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Restoration of Administrative Rights'; Chapter 17, Section entitled "Improperly Contracted Marriage")

Baha'is Marrying Contrary to Baha'i Law:
Attendance at Ceremony
Further to your letter of 5 September 1974, the Universal House of Justice has now had an opportunity to consider your question about believers attending weddings of Baha'is who are marrying contrary to Baha'i law, and we have been asked to convey to you the following.

If it is known beforehand that a believer is violating such laws, it would be inappropriate for the friends to attend the ceremony. This is out of respect for Baha'i law. However, if without realizing the situation believers find themselves in attendance at a ceremony in the course of which it is apparent that such a violation is occurring, they should not make an issue of it.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 11, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, Sections entitled "Handling Violations of Baha'i Law'; "Removal of Administrative Rights'; "Recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly'; "Meaning of Administrative Rights'; "Handling Appeals")

SUGGESTED READINGS

[16.30] Baha'i Marriage and Family Life: Selections from the Writings of the Baha'i Faith, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, 1983

Family Life, a collection of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1982

Marriage: A Fortress for Well-Being, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, 1973

Marriage and Family Life (available through Core Curriculum program)

17„DIVORCE

DIVORCE DISCOURAGED

[17.1] The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in

its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Baha'i concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 3, 1982, to an individual believer

God doth verily love union and concord, and abhorreth separation and divorce.
Baha'u'llah, in Extracts from the Baha'i Teachings Discouraging Divorce, p. 1

At all times hath union and association been well-pleasing in the sight of God, and separation and dissension abhorred. Hold fast unto that which God loveth and is His command unto you. He, verily, is the All-Knowing and the All-Seeing, and He is the All-Wise Ordainer.
Baha'u'llah, in Extracts from the Baha'i Teachings Discouraging Divorce, p. 1

The foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. If one of these two becomes the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Extracts from the Baha'i Teachings Discouraging Divorce, p.2

Regarding the Baha'i teachings on divorce. While the latter has been made permissible by Baha'u'llah yet He has strongly discouraged its practice, for if not checked and seriously controlled it leads gradually to the disruption of family life and to the disintegration of society.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
in Extracts from the Baha'i Teachings Discouraging Divorce, p.3

[17.2] Baha'i Law permits divorce but, as both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'lBaha have made very clear, divorce is abhorred. Thus, from the point of view of the individual believer he should do all he can to refrain from divorce. Baha'is should be profoundly aware of the sanctity of marriage and should strive to make their marriages an eternal bond of unity and harmony. This requires effort and sacrifice and wisdom and self-abnegation.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 3, 1982, quoted in a letter dated May 17, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Baha'u'llah, as you have mentioned, abhors divorce, and therefore the Baha'is should do their utmost to preserve their marriage which is a divinely ordained institution. But, as divorce is not prohibited in the Faith, and as it is a personal matter, the Universal House of Justice does not wish to interfere in such cases.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, October 4, 1978, quoted in a letter from the Universal House of Justice dated May 17, 1988

Conditions Under Which Divorce Might Be Considered
A Baha'i should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner. This is the standard held up to the individual. It is not a law, but

an exhortation. It is a goal to which we should strive.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 3, 1982

Irreconcilable antipathy arising between the parties to a marriage is not merely a lack of love for one's spouse but an antipathy which cannot be resolved. It is for the Spiritual Assembly to decide whether this condition exists before it sets the date for the beginning of the year of waiting, and this it may do on the application of one of the parties. It is not affected by the other party's not wishing to apply for a divorce.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 12, 1979, in Handbook For Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia, p. 59

In the strict legal sense there are no "grounds" for a Baha'i divorce. No question of misbehavior of either party is involved and the only condition under which a Baha'i divorce may be considered is the irreconcilable antipathy of the parties. Thus it is not sufficient that one or both of the parties has asked that the date for the beginning of the year of waiting be fixed; the Assembly must find the condition of irreconcilable antipathy to exist before the date can be fixed.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 24, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

[17.3] Concerning the definition of the term "aversion" in relation to Baha'i divorce law, the Universal House of Justice points out that there are no specific "grounds" for Baha'i divorce such as there are in some codes of civil law. Baha'i law permits divorce but, as both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha have made very clear, divorce is abhorred. Thus, from the point of view of the individual believer he should do all he can to refrain from divorce. Baha'is should be profoundly aware of the sanctity of marriage and should strive to make their marriages an eternal bond of unity and harmony. This requires effort and sacrifice and wisdom and self-abnegation. A Baha'i should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner. This is the standard held up to the individual. It is not a law, but an exhortation. It is a goal to which we should strive.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 3, 1982

REQUIREMENTS FOR BAHA'I DIVORCE

The Year of Waiting
During the year the couple have the responsibility of attempting to reconcile their differences, and the Assembly has the duty to help them and encourage them....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 3,1982

Purpose
It is understood that two Baha'is who reach the point of strain where they feel a divorce is necessary need time to cool down and reflect, which is, of course,

the purpose of the year of waiting.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 3, 1981,
quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, p. DIV-15

Use of the Terms "Year of Waiting" and "Year of Patience'
In reply to your letter of...requesting clarification about the use of the phrases "year of waiting" and "year of patience," the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that while it is preferable to use "year of waiting," either phrase can be used.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 9, 1982

With Non-Baha'i Partner
With regard to the question of Baha'i divorce, the year of separation is necessary even though the non-Baha'i partner to the marriage is the one instituting the divorce proceedings....
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 28, 1966, in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 309, par. 11.3.8

Required Whether or Not Baha'i When Married
As regards Baha'i divorce as mentioned in your letter of June 12th: Baha'is (whether one party or both are believers) should follow the Baha'i law of divorce, i.e. one year of waiting, and not [17.4] neglect this divinely given Law. Whether they were Baha'is when married or not has nothing to do with it.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, June 12, 1952

Consent of Only One Party Required
We must point out that immediately an application is received by a Baha'i Institution for setting the date of a year of waiting prior to divorce, it is the duty of that Institution to examine the application completely and impartially and do its utmost to effect a reconciliation between the parties. Either party may apply for the year of waiting without the consent of the other.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 28, 1966, in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 305, par. 11.2.3

Physical Separation Required
The Baha'i law requires that the parties separate for one full year before the divorce may be realized. This contemplates complete physical separation in the sense that they should not reside in the same dwelling.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 23, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The couple must realize that the year of patience cannot begin to run unless and until they are living apart, and it is for them to decide between them which will leave the home.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 2, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Conditions Under Which Year of Waiting is Not Required

Ignorance of the Law

In cases in which your Assembly has decided that the believe rwas ignorant of the law requiring him to have a Baha'i divorce before marrying another, and a civil divorce has already been obtained, your Assembly may in its discretion excuse him and he would be regarded as in the same status as one who obtained a divorce before becoming a Baha'i.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 14, 1976, quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, p. DIV-21

Divorce Proceeding Begun Before Enrollment as a Baha'i

You ask about the contact who wishes to declare her faith, having already initiated legal steps to divorce her husband. As this case is already in process before her declaration she does not have to observe Baha'i divorce law.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 21, 1968, in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 315, par. 11.5.8

Baha'is Without Administrative Rights

A Baha'i who has lost his administrative rights is administratively expelled from the community and therefore is not subject to the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Assembly in the matter of laws of [17.5] personal status, such as divorce, unless, of course, he is involved in such a matter through having a Baha'i spouse in good standing from whom the divorce is taking place. His observance of such laws is a matter of conscience and he would not be subject to further sanctions for non-observance of Baha'i laws during the period he is without voting rights.

In the case you mention, therefore, where the Baha'i without voting rights is being divorced from his non-Baha'i wife, the Assembly should not take jurisdiction of the matter. He is free to obtain a civil divorce and whether or not he observes a year of waiting is a matter for his own conscience.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 6, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Improperly Contracted Marriage

When reinstatement calls for a divorce or annulment of an improperly contracted marriage, no year of waiting is necessary because Baha'i divorce is not involved. The purpose of the year of waiting is to attempt the saving of a marital relationship which was originally accepted as valid in the eyes of Baha'is, and is now in jeopardy.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 27, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 16, "Correcting a Conscious Violation")

Legal Annulment

If a Baha'i legally annuls his marriage through the civil courts, he is not obligated to observe a year of waiting.

(See also "Annulment," in this Chapter)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

When a couple or a partner to a marriage approaches an Assembly with the intention of starting a year of waiting, the Assembly should review the Baha'i teachings on divorce with them. It may be pointed out that divorce is condemned and that a condition of aversion, antipathy and repugnance must exist to justify the extreme measure of dissolving the marriage.

Initial Meeting

Since the Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility to determine whether irreconcilable antipathy exists and the duty to try to reconcile the couple, it is important that it meet with both parties, if possible. If one of the parties is not a Baha'i, the Assembly may extend an invitation for the person to meet with the Assembly or its representatives, but should not pursue the issue if he or she seems to have no desire to meet with the Assembly.

Rather than setting the date of the year of waiting immediately, it may be wise to give the couple a chance to reflect on the [17.6] Assembly's guidance. In some cases a period of separation may be more appropriate than the initiation of the year of waiting.

After the initial meeting, the Assembly may meet with the couple periodically, either separately or together. The Assembly may also consider whether the couple would benefit from seeing a marriage counselor. If this is thought to be advisable, it is vital that the counselor be one whose views of marriage are consistent with the Baha'i teachings. Many counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists hold views and advocate practices which are at odds with the Baha'i teachings and which can lead to the further disintegration of the marital bond.

Assemblies with large communities might consider appointing a mature and deepened believer who is professionally trained to counsel married couples, or they may wish to have a member of the Assembly take courses on marriage counseling. The Local Spiritual Assembly may also wish to recommend professional counseling, as well.

The Local Spiritual Assembly's role is to do whatever it can to assist the parties to reconcile their differences in order to save the marriage. Establishing a year of waiting should not be an automatic action simply because it has been requested. The Assembly may establish a year of waiting without knowing the reasons for the separation if the couple does not wish to discuss them, although it would certainly be preferable for the couple to be frank with their Assembly and to put full trust in its ability to guide them. After the year is established, the Assembly will wish to consult on a regular basis with the couple to do all it can to assist in their reconciliation.

Obligation to Consider Application

An Assembly is obliged to consider an application for a year of waiting from either party to a marriage, whether the other party wants the divorce or not.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 28, 1985, in Lights of Guidance, p. 398

Should Not Intervene Unless Compelling Reasons
There should be no intervention into the marital affairs of individuals in a Baha'i community unless and until the parties themselves bring a problem to the Assembly. Prior to that it is not the business of the Assembly to counsel the parties.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 22, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Universal House of Justice later explained that the above-mentioned passage:

'...applies when neither party has brought any problem to the Assembly. In such circumstances, unless there are reasons [17.7] which would compel the Assembly to intervene, for example, where there is behavior prejudicial to the vital interests of the Faith, certainly no effort should be made on the part of the Assembly to pry into the marital affairs of any couple until the parties, or one of the parties, themselves refer to the Assembly.'
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 17, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also Chapter 15, "Criminal Matters in Which the State Claims Exclusive Interest")

Duty to Investigate and Try to Reconcile Couple
Baha'is who apply for divorce should be so counselled and left in no doubt that it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly concerned, according to the emphatic command of our scriptures, to do everything possible to bring about a reconciliation.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 3, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Mr.... "s assumption that the date...when he appeared before the Local Spiritual Assembly of...is the effective date of the beginning of the year of patience is incorrect. As we said in our letter...the beginning of the year of patience should not be set without first investigating the matter and making an effort at reconciliation.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 23, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is the Assembly's responsibility to conduct its own investigation and come to a decision. Assemblies are, of course, discouraged from probing unnecessarily into details of personal lives and the examination of a divorce problem should not go beyond what is necessary to ascertain whether or not such antipathy does, indeed, exist.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 30, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, p. 395

Setting the Date for the Beginning of the Year of Waiting

If no reconciliation is possible, and actual repugnance is found to exist between the parties, then the Assembly may record a date which is the beginning of the year of waiting.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 24, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is for the Local Spiritual Assembly, or the National Spiritual Assembly, as the case may be, to fix the date for the beginning of the year of patience which, in any event, cannot be earlier than the [17.8] date when the parties last separated with the intention of divorce. Thus the date of the beginning of the year of patience normally commences when one of the parties notifies the Assembly that they have separated with the intention of divorce. However, the Assembly may establish the beginning of the year of patience on a prior date provided it is satisfied such prior date reflects the actual date of separation and there is a good reason for so doing.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 26, 1965

When it determines that this [reconciliation] is not possible, it should then set the date of the beginning of the year of waiting. That could be the date on which the Assembly reaches the decision, unless the couple are still living together, in which case it must be postponed until they separate.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 11, 1986, in Lights of Guidance, p. 395

The Baha'i law requires that the parties separate for one full year before the divorce may be realized. This contemplates complete physical separation in the sense that they should not reside in the same dwelling.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 23, 1964, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Back-Dating the Year of Waiting
Regarding the back-dating of the beginning of the year of waiting; though this is a matter within the discretion of the Assembly, normally it should not be earlier than the date of application for Baha'i divorce unless there is a good and sufficient reason.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 7, 1970, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Spiritual Assembly may, if it is satisfied that there is sufficient reason for doing so, establish the date for the beginning of the year of waiting retroactively. Whether established retroactively or not the date set for the beginning of the year of waiting cannot be prior to the last date when the couple actually separated for the purpose of obtaining a divorce.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 26, 1972, in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, Reconciliation and Divorce, p. DIV-16

While there are circumstances in which the date of waiting may be fixed retroactively, the situation you describe of the [17.9] husband leaving for the purpose of finding work cannot be accepted as one of them.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 30, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, p. 395

Cannot Shorten the Period of Waiting
It is not possible to shorten the period of waiting as this is a provision of the Kitab-i-Aqdas.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 18, 1976

If Couple Cannot Be Persuaded to Withdraw Application
From the point of view of the Spiritual Assembly, however, the matter is somewhat different. The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Baha'i concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them. When an application for divorce is made to a Spiritual Assembly its first thought and action should be to reconcile the couple and to ensure that they know the Baha'i teachings on the matter. God willing, the Assembly will be successful and no year of waiting need be started. However, if the Assembly finds that it is unable to persuade the party concerned to withdraw the application for divorce, it must conclude that, from its point of view, there appears to be an irreconcilable antipathy, and it has no alternative to setting the date for the beginning of the year of waiting. During the year the couple have the responsibility of attempting to reconcile their differences, and the Assembly has the duty to help them and encourage them. But if the year of waiting comes to an end without reconciliation the Baha'i divorce must be granted as at the date of the granting of the civil divorce if this has not already taken place.

It can be seen, therefore, that "aversion" is not a specific legal term that needs to be defined. Indeed a number of other terms are used in describing the situation that can lead to divorce in Baha'i law, such as "antipathy," "resentment," "estrangement," "impossibility of establishing harmony," and "irreconcilability." The texts, however, point out that divorce is strongly condemned, should be viewed as "a last resort" when "rare and urgent circumstances" exist, and that the partner who is the "cause of divorce" will "unquestionably" become the "victim of formidable calamities."
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 3, 1982, to an individual believer

Role of Assembly During the Year of Waiting
When a Spiritual Assembly receives an application for Baha'i divorce its first duty is to try to reconcile the couple. If [17.10] this is not possible, and the couple separates, further efforts at reconciliation should be made during the ensuing year.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 30, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, p. 395

In the opening paragraphs of your letter you speak of your Committee adjudicating upon divorce settlements, and the House of Justice feels that the use of the word "adjudicate" may lie at the root of some of the problems that

the committee is facing. In a country...where divorce is subject to the civil law, the function of the Assembly (or its committee) in dealing with a divorce case is not primarily a matter of adjudication. Its first duty is to try to reconcile the couple. If it finds that it is unable to do this, it then sets the beginning of the year of waiting and continues, as circumstances permit and wisdom dictates, throughout the running of the year, its attempts at reconciliation.

One of the duties of the committee is to see that the requirements of Baha'i Law governing the year of waiting are not violated,„that is to say, that the two parties live apart and that proper provisions are made for the financial support of the wife and children. As you will see from the enclosures, this is a matter that needs to be considered for each case on its own merits. If the matter can be amicably arranged between the parties, well and good. If not, the basic principle of Baha'i Law is that the husband is responsible for the support of his wife and children so long as they are married; that is until the granting of the divorce. In a particular case, however, it may have been the wife who was the bread-winner of the family or both the husband and wife may have been earning income. The Assembly should not ignore such specific situations and change them merely because a year of waiting is running. The application of these principles should not be in the form of an adjudication which the Assembly will require the couple to accept, but as a basis for an arrangement which the couple will amicably agree to and present to the Court for endorsement. If the Assembly is unable to get the couple to agree, it should leave the matter to the civil court.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 24, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, p. 396

In Case of Suspected Child Abuse or Domestic Violence
An Assembly should consult with a couple if there is suspected child abuse or domestic violence. In the case of abuse or child neglect the matter of protection is paramount and could have legal ramifications [17.11] which might require the intervention of the civil authorities. Should an Assembly determine that a Baha'i's behavior is contrary to the Baha'i standards of conduct, it may consult with the person and offer appropriate advice. Such abuse is strongly condemned in the Faith and might lead to removal of Administrative rights.

(See also Chapter 3, "Confidentiality and the Civil Law," and also see Chapter 15, "Criminal Offenses and Disobedience to Civil Laws," and also see in this Chapter, "Permissible Reasons for Divorce")

Jurisdiction
Jurisdiction to decide on matters of personal status rests with the Assembly in whose area the individual believer currently resides. "Thus the Local Spiritual Assembly of the place where Mr.... resides has jurisdiction to entertain an application for a Baha'i divorce and to fix the date for the beginning of the year of waiting.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,

dated May 14, 1978, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Applications from Believers Living Outside the Assembly's Jurisdiction
Baha'is who do not live under the jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly are free to seek the assistance of any neighboring Assembly. Once the year of waiting has begun, however, jurisdiction for the year of waiting should be retained by the Assembly which established it.

Relocation of the Parties
If one partner moves during the year of waiting, it is preferable for the Assembly that initially counseled the couple to retain responsibility for the case. The person may seek the counsel of a new Local Spiritual Assembly, however, which should support the guidance and decisions of the Assembly which has jurisdiction. The new Local Spiritual Assembly should not assume jurisdiction for the year of waiting without the prior approval of the Spiritual Assembly that currently has jurisdiction and both parties to the year of waiting.

If both parties relocate but remain close to the original Assembly, that Assembly would retain jurisdiction. It is preferable that the parties stay close enough to each other during the year of waiting to create greater opportunities for consultation and to increase the possibility of reconciliation.

Transfer of Jurisdiction
While it is not forbidden for Baha'is to consult with a Local Spiritual Assembly other than their own, it is highly discouraged, because it could potentially undermine the authority and prestige of the Assembly under whose jurisdiction one resides.

[17.12] However, from time to time, a case arises where, for compelling reasons, it may be deemed advisable for an individual to take his problem to a Local Spiritual Assembly other than his own. In such instances, the National Spiritual Assembly has permitted jurisdiction to be transferred on the condition that the believer has his Local Spiritual Assembly's permission to go to another Assembly and the other Assembly is willing to take on the case.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUPLE

Obligation to Consult with an Assembly
It is necessary that Baha'is who intend to divorce be aware that they must consult with their Local or National Assembly, that basically a year of waiting must ensue before divorce can be effected, and that the Assembly has certain responsibilities toward the couple concerned about which they will be informed through consultation with the Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 16, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Should Actively Seek Reconciliation
It is for you, and for Mr...as well, to ponder carefully over the spiritual implications which any act of divorce on either part would involve, and

strengthened by the power of faith and confident in the blessing which strict adherence to the principles and laws of Baha'u'llah is bound to confer upon every one of His faithful followers, to make a fresh resolve to solve your common difficulties and to restore the harmony, peace and happiness of your family life.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, September 11, 1938,
in Extracts from the Baha'i Teachings Discouraging Divorce, p. 3

During the year the couple have the responsibility of attempting to reconcile their differences....
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 3, 1982,
quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's compilation, Reconciliation and Divorce, p. 14

It is always the hope that, during the year of patience, affection between the couple will recur and that divorce will not be necessary.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 15, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Financial Support
Baha'u'llah requires the husband to maintain the wife during the year of patience.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 23, 1970, in Handbook for Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia, 1980 version, p. 61

The House of Justice views it as a basic principle of Baha'i law that the husband is responsible for the support of his wife and [17.13] children as long as they are married, i.e. until the granting of a divorce. There may be particular circumstances in which the wife is the bread-winner of the family, or both husband and wife are earning income; such situations should not be ignored, or changed merely because the couple is in a year of waiting.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1989

The House of Justice wrote to another National Assembly on 5 April 1970 as follows:

The only provision of Baha'i law regarding the support of the wife is that which makes the husband responsible for her support during the year of waiting. This does not mean, however, that further support is prohibited; all such matters will require legislation in the future. At the present time it is the responsibility of the Assembly to arrange an amicable and just financial settlement between the couple, and any such arrangement must, obviously, take into consideration the financial situation of both parties and their relative responsibilities.

While it is obvious that the Assembly should encourage the husband to honor his Baha'i responsibilities in paying the required support money, matters of support may be covered by the civil courts when a civil divorce is applied for and, in such a case, the wife would, of course, be able to invoke whatever civil remedy is available.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 6, 1978

The basic principle of Baha'i Law is that the husband is responsible for the support of his wife and children so long as they are married; that is until the granting of the divorce. In a particular case, however, it may have been the wife who was the breadwinner of the family or both the husband and wife may have been earning income. The Assembly should not ignore such specific situations and change them merely because a year of waiting is running.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 24, 1983, in Lights of Guidance, # 1323

(See also in this Chapter, "Role of the Assembly During the Year")

Unfaithfulness
The provisions of the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha regarding exemption from the year of waiting because of infidelity applies to [17.14] both husband and wife. In a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer dated 28 April 1974, which is also included in the newly released compilation on the subject of women the following is stated:

It is apparent from the Guardian's writings that where Baha'u'llah has expressed a law as between a man and a woman it applies, mutatis mutandis, between a woman and a man unless the context should make this impossible....

This aspect of the Baha'i law of divorce, however, will need elucidation and supplementary legislation by the House of Justice. Therefore, at the present time, the year of waiting must be observed when adultery on the part of either party is proven.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 11, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

There is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha which states that the year of waiting is waived in the case of an unfaithful wife. This aspect of the Baha'i law of divorce, however, will need elucidation and supplementary legislation by the Universal House of Justice. Therefore, at the present time, in divorce cases such as the one you cited, the husband must still observe the year of waiting, which involves payment of the wife's expenses during this period.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 17, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Dating During the Year of Waiting
Dating in the spirit of courtship is outside the bounds of Baha'i propriety, even where the inter-personal relationship of the couple is not blatant or flagrant, casting reflections upon the strict morality required of Baha'is. The Baha'i should be advised to break off the acquaintanceship should it appear to progress beyond friendship....
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 6, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is always the hope that, during the year of patience, affection between the couple will recur and that divorce will not be necessary. Therefore, although

normal social relationships between each of the partners and members of both sexes are permissible, it is quite contrary to the spirit of the teachings for either party to be courting a new partner during the year of waiting. This should be made clear to the couple if necessary and they should be exhorted to conduct themselves as Baha'is. However, this is not an area in [17.15] which the Assembly should resort to sanctions if either or both of the pair disregard this principle. Naturally, if one of the parties conducts himself or herself in a way that is blatantly or flagrantly immoral the matter should be handled as any other similar case would be.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 6, 1974

Not Appropriate to Look for New Marriage Partner
The year of waiting is not the time for either of the parties to be looking for a new marriage partner. Their efforts should be directed to the preservation of the existing marriage.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 12, 1979, in Handbook For Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia, 1980 version, p. 61

Should Not Announce New Marriage Plans
It is not within the spirit of Baha'i law for one to become involved in the announcement of new marriage plans while he or she is still legally married to another. There is no objection to urging the friends not to go so far as to seek consent of parents before the divorce becomes final in all respects.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 17, 1971

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Remarriage")

When the Year of Waiting Can Be Voided
The year of waiting is voided when a couple share a common residence or have sexual relations. Violations of Baha'i moral laws and standards during the year of waiting do not void the year of waiting and must be treated separately.

Reconciliation
If, as a result of efforts at reconciliation, a normal marital relationship is resumed between the parties to a divorce, the whole process of divorce is considered to be abandoned. In case the parties later desire to divorce they must apply again for Baha'i divorce and the year of waiting must be commenced anew.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 5, 1967, quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, p. DIV-15

Sexual Relations Between Spouses
If intercourse between husband and wife takes place during the year of waiting, a new year must be set by the Spiritual Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 12, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Sharing a Common Residence
Regarding the question of voiding the year of waiting should a couple share a

common residence for one or two nights when the residence belongs to a third party, the House of Justice does not wish to make a ruling on such a general basis. In the case you mention involving temporary residence in the home of the parents [17.16] of one of the parties who are in a year of waiting, the House of Justice suggests you try to verify whether or not the purpose of the year of waiting has been preserved and if satisfied this is so, make your decision accordingly.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 2, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The parties to a divorce must live apart in separate residence during the year of waiting. Any cohabitation of the parties stops the running of the year of waiting. If thereafter a divorce is desired a new date for the beginning of a new year of waiting must be set by the Assembly.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 20, 1977,
in Lights of Guidance, p. 397

One Party Cannot Terminate Year
One party to a divorce, acting alone, cannot petition for a termination of the year of waiting.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 1, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If Spouse Remarries
When one of the parties to a Baha'i marriage loses his/her administrative rights by remarrying during the year of waiting, which is in violation of the Baha'i law of marriage, the other party is released from the need to complete the year of waiting.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 28, 1989, to a National Spiritual Assembly

(See also in this Chapter, Section "Remarriage")

We have your letter...asking about the termination of the year of waiting in the event of the remarriage of the nonBaha'i partner following a civil divorce. The need to observe the year of waiting is terminated by the marriage of the non-Baha'i partner in such cases.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 20, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly

RELATION OF THE CIVIL DIVORCE TO BAHA'I DIVORCE

Giving Legal Sanction to the Divorce
It should be pointed out that civil suit for divorce and Baha'i divorce are two entirely different matters.... Recourse to the civil authority is only for the purpose of giving legal sanction to the divorce.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 18, 1973

Initiation of Civil Divorce During the Year of Waiting
It is permissible, when necessary, to initiate civil divorce proceedings before the ending of the year of waiting. Obviously it is much more in the spirit of

Baha'i law for a believer to approach the [17.17] Spiritual Assembly before initiating any civil proceedings, but if he does the reverse this is not a sanctionable offense.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated September 20, 1973 quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, p. DIV-21

There is no Baha'i law requiring the removal of voting rights for obtaining a civil divorce before the end of the year of waiting. It is, of course, preferred that civil divorce action not be instituted or completed before the end of the year unless there are special circumstances justifying such action.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 20, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In answer to your third question regarding the initiation of civil proceedings during the year of patience, there is no objection to either party doing this so that the waiting period required by Baha'i Law runs concurrently with that required by civil law. As indicated in the enclosed correspondence, however, the Baha'i divorce does not become effective until the period of waiting has been terminated.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 6, 1969, in Handbook for Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia, p. 60

It is more within the spirit of Baha'i Law for Baha'is to postpone the initiation of civil proceedings, (if the law of the country requires a civil divorce) until the end of the year of waiting. However, if such postponement gives rise to inequity or to a legal prejudice against the possibility of a civil divorce, it is of course, permissible for the civil proceedings to be initiated during the year of waiting.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 20, 1977, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a Non-Baha'i Partner Obtains a Civil Divorce
If, as in the case cited, a civil divorce is granted to a non-Baha'i partner before the end of the year of patience, a Baha'i divorce cannot be granted until the end of that year. It has been known for a couple to obtain a civil divorce in this way and then become reconciled before the ending of the year, when they then had a civil marriage; from the Baha'i point of view they had never been divorced.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 23, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If Reconciliation Takes Place Before Civil Divorce and After the End of the Year of Waiting
As far as Baha'i law is concerned, divorce is automatically granted at the end of the year of waiting if reconciliation has [17.18] not taken place, but since in the United States Baha'i divorce cannot become effective until the civil divorce is granted, should the couple be reconciled during the period between the end of the year of waiting and the time when the civil divorce would become

effective, there would be no need for the parties to remarry according to Baha'i law.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 1, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Divorce Agreement, Child Support, Custody
In general...a Baha'i couple...who are obtaining a divorce must, in addition to the Baha'i divorce, obtain a civil divorce, and the civil divorce decree will usually cover all such matters as division of property, provision of support and custody of children. The function of the Spiritual Assembly in such ancillary aspects of the divorce is thus advisory rather than judicatory. In order to prevent, if possible, dispute between Baha'is in front of the law courts, the Assembly should attempt to bring the couple to an amicable arrangement about all such questions, which can then be submitted to the court for its endorsement. If the efforts of the Assembly are of no avail, then the matter must be left to the civil court to decide.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 13, 1983

While it is obvious that the Assembly should encourage the husband to honor his Baha'i responsibilities in paying the required support money, matters of support may be covered by the civil courts when a civil divorce is applied for and, in such a case, the wife would, of course, be able to invoke whatever civil remedy is available.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 6, 1978

Parties to a civil divorce action are free to raise the question of alimony in the civil action in any way they like. However, it is preferable for the parties to settle their financial affairs privately prior to the civil action.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 26, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is the responsibility of the Assembly to assist the divorced couple to arrive at an amicable settlement of their financial affairs and arrangement for the custody and support of the children rather than let these matters be a subject of litigation in the civil courts. If the [17.19] Assembly is unable to bring the couple to an agreement on such matters then their only recourse is to the civil court.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 20, 1977

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 9 December 1982 requesting guidance on the responsibility of Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies in the matter of financial support in divorce cases. It has instructed us to send you the following reply.

In some cases, usually those of Iranian believers whose marriage is not recognized by civil law and who, therefore, do not need and cannot have a civil divorce, the divorce must be entirely adjudicated by the Spiritual Assembly. We enclose a summary of points written on behalf of the House of Justice in answer to questions on this matter, which should be of assistance should such a case

occur in...

In general, however, a Baha'i couple in...who are obtaining a divorce must, in addition to the Baha'i divorce, obtain a civil divorce, and the civil divorce decree will usually cover all such matters as division of property, provision of support and custody of children. The function of the Spiritual Assembly in such ancillary aspects of the divorce is thus advisory rather than judicatory. In order to prevent, if possible, a public dispute between Baha'is in front of the law courts, the Assembly should attempt to bring the couple to an amicable arrangement about all such questions, which can then be submitted to the court for its endorsement. If the efforts of the Assembly are of no avail, then the matter must be left to the civil court to decide.

Once the divorce decree with its related provisions has been handed down by the court, it is the obligation of both parties, as good Baha'is, to obey it and, if either is lax in so doing, the Assembly should advise him or her about his or her duties and press for their fulfillment. The wronged party, however, should at the same time be left free to apply to the civil authorities for the enforcement of the decision. Unfortunately such enforcement is notoriously difficult, especially when the parties subsequently reside in different countries. It is here that the action of the Spiritual Assembly, reinforcing the decision of the civil courts, can often be of help. Except in circumstances of unusual gravity or cases where the responsible party fails to obey a court decision to provide support for the children an Assembly should not contemplate imposing sanctions for [17.20] lack of compliance in these matters. Actual enforcement should normally be left to the action of the civil courts.

The House of Justice believes that the above should provide all the guidance you require in your collaboration with the National Spiritual Assembly of...over the divorce of...and...In the case of...and...you state that there is unlikely to be a civil judgment covering the question of financial support of the wife by the husband following the divorcee. The House of Justice states that these is no general requirement in Baha'i law for a husband to continue to support his former wife beyond the ending of the year of waiting and the granting of the divorce. Therefore, in the absence of a ruling by the civil court or of an agreement between the couple registered with the Spiritual Assembly, there is nothing further for your Assembly to do in this case. Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Lights of Guidance, par. 1335

While the 50 states have authorized Local Spiritual Assemblies to conduct marriages on their behalf, they have not recognized the legitimacy of Baha'i divorce. The states have retained exclusive jurisdiction over divorce and related matters, such as child custody and support and property and financial settlements.

Sometimes a couple or one of the parties asks the Local Spiritual Assembly to give advice on child custody and support or the financial settlement. As the Universal House of Justice points out, ideally the Assembly could help the

couple reach an agreement before the case is taken to court. The Assembly should also take into consideration the degree to which the parties are able to cooperate with each other and their willingness to accept the Assembly's advice. Many Assemblies spend time consulting on such questions only to find that one or both of the parties are unwilling to accept its advice. Precious time is wasted and the energies of the Assembly are drained.

An Assembly's role in divorce matters is purely advisory. If one or both of the parties vow to obey the Assembly's advice and then fail to do so, sanctions cannot be imposed.

If a Local Spiritual Assembly consults with one or both of the parties to a divorce on matters pertaining to the divorce settlement, the Assembly should be certain to point out that (1) its role is advisory, (2) ideally the Assembly's advice would be written into the civil divorce decree, and (3) if either party finds the Assembly's advice unsatisfactory, they should seek resolution through civil courts.

[17.21] Obligation of the Couple to Obey Civil Divorce Decree

Whatever the court decides, however, regarding provisions for support of the children, it is binding upon both parties, and, as Baha'is they will obey the decree of the civil court regardless of where they may be domiciled in the future.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 30, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Assembly Should Encourage Couple to Fulfill Divorce Decree

Once the divorce decree with its related provisions has been handed down by the court, it is the obligation of both parties, as good Baha'is, to obey it and, if either is lax in so doing, the Assembly should advise him or her about his or her duties and press for their fulfillment.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 13, 1983

Since custody of the children is already before the civil courts we feel you should not become involved in it.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 13, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Except in circumstances of unusual gravity or cases where the responsible party fails to obey a court decision to provide support for the children, an Assembly should not contemplate imposing sanctions for lack of compliance in these matters. Actual enforcement should normally be left to the action of the civil courts.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated January 13, 1983, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If either party seeks a different result in court, the Assembly should withdraw from the case entirely and inform the parties. It is unfortunate when this occurs, but until Baha'i institutions evolve to the point where they have binding authority over domestic relations, Assemblies are limited in their

ability to assist.

Once the divorce decree with its related provisions has been handed down by the court, it is the obligation of both parties, as good Baha'is, to obey it and, if either is lax in so doing, the Assembly should advise him or her about his or her duties and press for their fulfillment. The wronged party, however, should at the same time be left free to apply to the civil authorities for the enforcement of the decision. Unfortunately, such enforcement is notoriously difficult, especially when the parties subsequently reside in different countries. It is here that the action of the Spiritual Assembly, reinforcing the decision of the civil courts, can often be of help.... Actual enforcement should normally be left to the action of the civil courts.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 13, 1983

[17.22] Remarriage
Even though a Baha'i has obtained a civil divorce, under Baha'i law he cannot be regarded as divorced unless he has also obtained a Baha'i divorce, therefore he is not free to marry. Should he attempt to marry and in the process violate the Baha'i law governing marriage, he is, of course, subject to sanction.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 13, 1975, quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, p. DIV-21

The believer will be subject to sanctions if he should marry a third party within the year of patience, not only because it is a violation of the year of patience itself, but also because even though a civil divorce has been granted, the Baha'i divorce cannot be granted until the end of the year of patience. For this reason no marriage is possible during the running of the year of patience unless the parties to the divorce remarry each other in a civil ceremony.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 18, 1973, quoted in the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada's Assembly Resource Compilation, p. DIV-20

In cases in which your Assembly has decided that the believer was ignorant of the law requiring him to have a Baha'i divorce before marrying another, and a civil divorce has already been obtained, your Assembly may in its discretion excuse him and he would be regarded as in the same status as one who obtained a divorce before becoming a Baha'i.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 14, 1976

GRANTING THE BAHA'I DIVORCE

You should make it clear that a Baha'i Divorce cannot be granted prior to the granting of a final divorce decree in the civil action nor before the expiration of the year of patience.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 5, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

It is the responsibility of the Assembly to register the end of the Year of Patience and advise the couple of it. If the Assembly determines that the couple has not been able to be reconciled and that the year of patience has truly been completed, then they may grant the Baha'i divorce.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 23, 1966

Withholding the Divorce
During the ensuing year," the Universal House of Justice has explained, "it is highly desirable that further efforts at reconciliation should be made, but if no reconciliation is attained, the divorce may be realized. The Assembly has no authority to withhold [17.23] the divorce on the ground that one party has made no real effort toward reconciliation.'
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 24, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Extending the Year of Waiting
It is not within the discretion of the parties to a Baha'i divorce to extend the year of waiting and ask for the Baha'i divorce "at whatever time they feel so inclined." If there has been no reconciliation of the parties in the meantime, the Baha'i divorce becomes final at the end of the year of waiting unless the granting of the civil divorce is delayed beyond that time.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 12, 1979, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Delaying or Interfering with the Civil Divorce
When a year of waiting ends without reestablishment of the marriage relationship, it is not in the spirit of the Faith for one party to delay or interfere with the civil divorce which thereafter must occur in order to legalize the Baha'i divorce.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 1, 1978, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Date on which a Baha'i Divorce Should be Granted
The date on which a Baha'i divorce should be granted is either 1) the date of the completion of the year of waiting (if the civil divorce has already been finalized), or 2) the date of the finalization of the civil divorce (if the year of waiting has already been completed). The date the Assembly receives proof of the granting of the civil divorce or the date the divorce is recorded in the Assembly's minutes is irrelevant.

Reporting to the National Spiritual Assembly
The Local Spiritual Assembly should report to the National Spiritual Assembly by letter when it has set a date for the year of waiting. The report should include the full names of both parties, their Baha'i identification numbers, and the beginning date of the year of waiting.

The Assembly should also notify the National Spiritual Assembly when reconciliation occurs, when a new date for the year of waiting is set, or when the Baha'i divorce is granted. Again, the full names and identification numbers of both parties are needed, along with the dates concerned.

Before the Baha'i divorce is granted, the couple should provide proof to the Assembly that the civil divorce has been finalized. Either a copy of the civil divorce decree or a cover letter which includes the date of the final divorce is acceptable. Some divorce decrees are "sealed" and thus are not a public document. It is important that the Local Spiritual Assembly treat these documents confidentially.

[17.24] (See also Chapter 4, Section entitled "Confidentiality")

Annulment
Should either party, following the recital of the specifically revealed verse and the payment of the dowry, take a dislike to the other, before the marriage is consummated, the period of waiting is not necessary prior to divorce. The taking back of the dowry, however, is not permitted.
Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 41

Regarding the annulment of marriage: There is no provision in the Aqdas regarding this matter. The House of Justice will have to legislate on it in the future. Any cases that arise at present should be decided in a way that will not conflict with the civil laws concerning marriage and annulment of marriage.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated March 28, 1943, to a National Spiritual Assembly

We have not yet dealt with the subject of annulment of Baha'i marriage and therefore do not wish to give any rulings at this time. Under Baha'i law it may be possible under certain circumstances to have a Baha'i divorce without compelling the parties to observe the year of waiting, or to annul a Baha'i marriage. However, we have not as yet defined the circumstances, therefore in the case you mention we leave it to the discretion of your Assembly to handle the matter as you deem advisable.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 23, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If it is established that since the marriage ceremony irreconcilable aversion has developed and there has been no consummation of the marriage, the year of waiting, according to the statement on page 41 of the Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, is not required.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 22, 1987

If a Baha'i's marriage is legally annulled, he or she is not obligated to observe a year of waiting. It has been the position of the National Spiritual Assembly to honor annulments granted by the civil courts. In such cases, the parties are not required to complete the year of waiting or to be granted a Baha'i divorce. The Local Spiritual Assembly merely notes in its minutes the date on which the civil annulment was granted.

SUGGESTED READINGS

[17.25] Baha'i Marriage and Family Life: Selections from the Writings of the Baha'i Faith, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, 1983

Divorce: Writings Discouraging Divorce, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Published by Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United Kingdom, 1986

Family Life, Baha'u'llah, the Bab 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1982

18„BURIAL LAW, WILLS, LIFE AFTER DEATH

BURIAL LAW

[18.1] Responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly
The burial of the dead is an occasion of great solemnity and importance, and while the conduct of the funeral service and the arrangements for the interment may be left to the relatives of the deceased, the Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for educating the believers in the essential requirements of the Baha'i law of burial as at present applied, and in courteously and tactfully drawing these requirements to the attention of the relatives if there is any indication that they may fail to observe them. These requirements are: that the body not be cremated; that it not be transported more than an hour's journey from the place of death to the place of burial; that the Prayer for the Dead be recited if the deceased is a Baha'i of fifteen years of age or more; and that the funeral be carried out in a simple and dignified manner that would be a credit to the community.

In some parts of the world, if Local Spiritual Assemblies fail to carry out these sacred duties, some believers might gradually drift away from the Faith and even pay dues to churches or other religious organizations to ensure that, when they require to register the birth of a child, to solemnize a marriage or to have a funeral service, there will be a religious institution ready to perform the necessary services. Conversely, when Local Assemblies have arisen to carry out these responsibilities, the believers have acquired a sense of security and solidarity, and have become confident that in such matters they can rely upon the agencies of the World Order of Baha'u'llah.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 17, 1981, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

[18.2] Financial Assistance
When a Baha'i in a community has passed away, for whatever cause, the Local Spiritual Assembly, or the National Spiritual Assembly, as the case may be, does have a responsibility to provide for a proper burial which cannot be provided for either by the family or by insurance.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 17, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If Relatives of the Deceased Are Not Baha'i
Concerning the burial of a Baha'i youth, if the burial has not taken place and there is time to do so, the non-Baha'i family should be advised that the deceased is a Baha'i (assuming they do not already know it), and every effort

should be made to induce the family to allow the body of their deceased Baha'i relative to be buried according to the requirements of his Faith. However, if they remain adamant, or if the burial has already taken place, there is nothing which can be done except, perhaps, to say prayers for the deceased.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 13, 1975, in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 343, par. 12.5.5

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "If Plans Are Made for Cremation")

Official Baha'i Funeral Service Is for Baha'is
An official Baha'i funeral service should only be given for a believer, but there is no objection to the reading of Baha'i prayers, or indeed to a Baha'i conducting the funeral service of a non-Baha'i, if this has been requested.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated July 20, 1946, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Funeral Service May Be Given for Deprived Believers
He [a believer deprived of his voting rights] may have the Baha'i burial service if he or his family requests it....
Enclosed with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, December 9, 1985, in Lights of Guidance, p. 62

Attendance at Non-Baha'i Funeral of a Baha'i
There is no objection to Baha'is attending the non-Baha'i funeral service of a Baha'i whose non-Baha'i relatives have prevented the Baha'i funeral from taking place. The Baha'is should, however, endeavor to offer Baha'i prayers for the progress of the soul of their departed friend, if circumstances permit. If they cannot be offered on the occasion of the funeral they should be offered at another time.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 4, 1966

[18.3] Requirements Currently Binding on Western Believers
The following parts of this law...are now binding on the believers in the West:
1. That the body must be buried, not cremated.
2. That the Prayer for the Dead is to be recited for a believer of the age of 15 or over. This, as you know, is the prayer which appears as number CLXVII in Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah.
3. That the body not be transported more than an hour's journey from the place of death. The method of transport is not specified, but the journey must not take longer than one hour.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 3, 1975, in Lights of Guidance, p. 194

Funeral Service
Simple and Flexible
Regarding the Baha'i funeral service: it is extremely simple, as it consists only of a congregational prayer to be read before burial...(The) National Spiritual Assembly should take great care lest any uniform procedure or ritual in this matter be adopted or imposed upon the friends. The danger in this, as in some other cases regarding Baha'i worship, is that a definite system of

rigid rituals and practices be developed among the believers. The utmost simplicity and flexibility should be observed, and a selection from the Baha'i Sacred Writings would serve the purpose at the present time, provided this selection is not rigidly and uniformly adopted on all such occasions.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 14

Prayer for the Dead
The Prayer for the Dead is published in Prayers and Meditations of Baha'u'llah, No. CLXVII. It is the only Baha'i obligatory prayer which is to be recited in congregation; it is to be recited by one believer while all present stand. There is no requirement to face the Qiblih when reciting this prayer.
Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 58

There is a difference between chanting a prayer collectively and congregational prayer. The latter is a formal prayer usually led by an individual using a prescribed ritual. Congregational prayer in this form is forbidden in the Faith except in the case of the Prayer for the Dead.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 6, 1975, quoted in an unpublished compilation, "Extracts on Baha'i Burial," included with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 25, 1984

[18.4] The prayer for the dead which is obligatory...allows for a change in gender. Other prayers for the dead are optional but if used they are to be used as revealed.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 1, 1967

There is no objection whatsoever to non-Baha'is being present when the long prayer for the dead is read, as long as they respect our manner of reading it by rising and standing as the Baha'is do on this occasion. Nor, indeed, is there any objection to non-Baha'is being present during the reading of any Baha'i prayer for the departed.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #234, August 1950, p. 1

The formal prayer and the ring are meant to be used for those who have attained the age of maturity.
Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 63

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "Burial Rings")

No Cremation
He feels that, in view of what 'Abdu'l-Baha has said against cremation, the believers should be strongly urged, as an act of faith, to make provisions against their remains being cremated. Baha'u'llah has laid down as a law, in the Aqdas, the manner of Baha'i Burial, and it is so beautiful, befitting and dignified, that no believer should deprive himself of it.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #198, August 1947, p. 3

Concerning your question about cremation, the Baha'i law stipulates burial. The instructions of Baha'u'llah contained in His Most Holy book makes this law

clear. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer in 1955, comments that 'Abdu'l-Baha "...also explained that burial is natural and should be followed." The explanation of the Master referred to by Shoghi Effendi is found in the Tablets revealed by Him. One of those was published in Star of the West, Volume XI, No. 19, page 317, from which we quote:

Thy letter has been received. Due to the scarcity of time, I write the answer briefly: The body of man, which has been formed gradually, must similarly be decomposed gradually. This is according to the real and natural order and Divine Law. If it had been better for it to be burned after death, in its very creation it would have been so planned that the body would [18.5] automatically become ignited after death, be consumed and turned into ashes. But the divine order formulated by the heavenly ordinance is that after death this body shall be transferred from one stage to another different from the preceding one, so that according to the relations which exist in the world, it may gradually combine and mix with other elements, thus going through stages until it arrives in the vegetable kingdom, there turning into plants and flowers, developing into trees of the highest paradise, becoming perfumed and attaining the beauty of color.

Cremation suppresses it speedily from attainment to these transformations, the elements becoming so quickly decomposed that transformation to these various stages is checked.

When we realize that our physical bodies are composed of elements placed in the earth by their Creator, and which through the orderly process of His law are continually being used in the formation of beings, we can better understand the necessity for our physical bodies to be subjected to the gradual process of decomposition: As at the time of death, the real and eternal self of man, his soul, abandons its physical garment to soar in the realms of God, we may compare the body to a vehicle which has been used for the journey through earthly life and no longer needed once the destination has been reached.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated June 6, 1971, in Lights of Guidance, pp. 201-202

Naturally Aborted Fetus Not to Be Cremated
The letter from the Spiritual Assembly of...indicates that the miscarriage took place when the mother was approximately four months into her pregnancy, therefore, they could have been assured that they did the right thing in having the fetus buried. Also, it would have been helpful for the Assembly to know that the hospital policy of incinerating a naturally aborted fetus is not in keeping with Baha'i law which prohibits cremation.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated December 3, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If Plans Are Made for Cremation
Whereas believers should be informed of the Baha'i law of burial and urged to ensure that their remains are not cremated this is a matter of education and

not one involving the imposition of sanctions.

Obviously a Spiritual Assembly cannot itself arrange for the cremation of remains of a Baha'i even if it was that person's wish [18.6] that his remains be disposed of in this way. Also, whenever a Spiritual Assembly learns that the non-Baha'i relations of a deceased Baha'i are proposing to cremate the remains, the Assembly should do all it can to explain the Baha'i attitude to the relations in an effort to prevent the cremation.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 9, 1984, in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 342, par. 12.5.3

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "If the Relatives of the Deceased Are Not Baha'i")

Embalming the Body
Under the Baha'i teachings it seems clear that the body is not to be embalmed.... The practice in the Orient is to bury the person within 24 hours of the time of death; sometimes even sooner; although there is no provision in the teachings as to the time limit.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 2, 1955, to an individual believer

Baha'u'llah has advised that it is preferable for burial to take place as soon after death as possible. When circumstances do not permit interment of the body to occur very soon after passing, or when it is a requirement of civil law, the body may be embalmed, provided that the process used has the effect of temporarily retarding the natural decomposition for a period of short duration. However, the body should not be subjected to an embalming process which has the effect of preserving it without decomposition for a lengthy period; such processes often aim to preserve the body indefinitely.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 17, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Many people assume that state law requires that the body be embalmed. Some funeral directors even imply that embalming is a law, even when it is not. At this time, we are not aware of any state which requires embalming as long as 1) the burial is within twentyfour hours, 2) there is no contagious disease and 3) the body is not shipped across state lines. A Local Spiritual Assembly can call the State Department of Licensing and Regulation to determine whether embalming is a state requirement.

Burial Within One Hour's Distance
It is forbidden you to carry the body more than an hour's distance from the town; bury it with tranquillity and cheer in a nearby place.
Kitab-i-Aqdas, quoted in an unpublished compilation, "Extracts on Baha'i Burial," included with a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
March 25, 1984

[18.7] Question: Regarding the carrying of the dead where it is bidden that

they should be buried within one hour's distance, does this law apply to transportation both by land and sea, or is it otherwise?

Answer: The law applies to transportation by land as well as by sea, whether it be an hour's distance by boat or train. The purpose is the time-limit of one hour, no matter what means of conveyance is employed. However, the sooner the burial takes place, the more fitting and preferable.
Questions and Answers,,A supplement to the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Extracts on Baha'i Burial, included in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 25, 1984

The Universal House of Justice advises that the place of death may be taken to be the city or town in which the believer passes away, and therefore the hour's journey may be calculated from the city limits to the place of burial. However, it should be borne in mind that the spirit of Baha'u'llah's law is to be buried near where one dies.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 20, 1978

Please refer to the Kitab-i-Aqdas for detail.

Requirements Not Yet Binding on Western Believers
Although the following requirements are not currently binding on the Western believers, they are being included in this chapter so that Assemblies will become familiar with them and be able to provide guidance to the Persian believers, on whom they are binding.

1. The body should be wrapped in a shroud of silk or cotton.

2. A burial ring should be placed on the finger of the deceased before interment.

3. The coffin should be made of crystal, stone or of a hard, fine wood.

Note: Burial rings can be purchased through the Baha'i Distribution Service.

Preparation of the Body
The preparation of the body for burial is a careful washing, and placing in a shroud of white cloth, silk preferably.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 2, 1955, to an individual believer

The Bab has told us to bury the dead in silk (if possible) in coffins of crystal. Why? Because the body, though now dust, was once exalted by the immortal soul of man!
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News, #210, August 1948, p. 2

[18.8] Burial Rings
Briefly the law for the burial of the dead states...that the body should be wrapped in a shroud of silk or cotton, and on its finger should be placed a ring bearing the inscription "I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the

Compassionate"; and that the coffin should be of crystal, stone or hard fine wood.
Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 62

The placing of the burial stone [ring] on the dead has no other significance than to emphasize our profound conviction that our souls come from our Creator and to Him they return, and in Him we believe and trust.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Dawn of a New Day, p. 101

Coffins
With reference to the use of hard wood or crystal coffins for the burial of the dead, you will be interested to know that the Bab revealed the passage which appears on page 95 of Selections from the Writings of the Bab, in connection with an injunction to bury a body in a marble coffin. Of particular significance is the sentence "Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causeth repugnance may be experienced."

The law of burial was confirmed by Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. The clarifications given by 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi are based on that law and are equally binding.

Baha'u'llah's laws are for the whole world and for the duration of His Dispensation. Certain exigencies in specific parts of the world at this time, such as the high cost of coffins or limitation of burial space in some countries, cannot become the determining factors as to what is best for humankind all over the world and for centuries to come. The specific burial problems you have mentioned require specific solutions which should be arrived at through consultation with Baha'i institutions on a case-by-case basis.

You speak of Baha'i laws and ordinances having "strong Islamic overtones." It may be of interest to you to know that there is no law in Islam requiring the body to be buried in a coffin, yet those who have embraced the Faith from Islamic background have radiantly accepted and complied with the law.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 3, 1987, to an individual believer

[18.9] Other Related Topics
Baha'i Cemeteries
The Guardian thinks the ideal thing would be for the believers to have a Baha'i cemetery.
Written on behalf of the Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated September 5, 1950, to an individual believer

At the present time there are no definite regulations for preparing Baha'i cemeteries. However, in a Tablet of the Master's, He emphasizes the need for the cemetery to have a beautiful outward appearance and states that the graves should not be joined together but that each one should have a flower bed around its four sides. He also indicates that it would be pleasing if a pool were

located in the center of the cemetery and beautiful trees were planted around it as well as around the cemetery itself.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated February 20, 1978, in "Extracts on Baha'i Burial'

(See also Chapter 14, Section entitled "Baha'i Cemeteries")

Burial of Deprived Believers
He [a believer deprived of his rights] may be buried in a Baha'i cemetery.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 9, 1985, in Lights of Guidance, p. 62

Burial of Non-Baha'i Relatives
It is quite possible that non-Baha'i relatives of believers or others may be permitted to be buried in a Baha'i cemetery.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 3, 1975, in Lights of Guidance, p. 202

Gravestone Symbols
As regards your question: there is no reason why the word "Baha'i" should not appear in the center of a nine-pointed star on the tombstone of...but the ring-stone emblem should not be used, nor the Greatest Name.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, September 30, 1955

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 22 August 1975, about the marking of Baha'i graves. We have been asked to tell you that nothing has been found in the Writings making this a requirement. However, in Baha'i cemeteries in "Akka and Haifa, the graves are marked and some of the words on the headstones are those of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. As you know, Shoghi Effendi indicated that the Most Great Name would not be appropriate for gravestones and has suggested [18.10] that such inscriptions as a nine-pointed star and extracts from the Writings would be suitable.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated November 13, 1975, in Australian Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, p. 345, par. 12.6.4

Position of Body in Grave
Normally the building of structures or headstones on graves should be left to the family of the deceased, and all expenses should be covered by them.

The use of the Most Great Name or the ringstone symbol on gravestones is not appropriate. In a letter dated September 17, 1971 to an individual believer we wrote the following:

Concerning the questions you ask in postscript, there is no specific ruling regarding the type of headstone that may be used at a grave site. However, regarding the inscription on a headstone, the beloved Guardian asked the believers not to use any form of the Greatest Name but a nine-pointed star may be used. Or, you may wish to have an appropriate text from the Sacred Writings inscribed on the headstone. The position of the body in the grave should be with the feet pointing toward the Qiblih, which is Bahji in "Akka.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 4, 1972

Donation of Body to Medical Science

There is nothing in the Teachings against leaving our bodies to medical science. The only thing we should stipulate is that we do not wish to be cremated, as it is against our Baha'i laws.

As many people make arrangements to leave their bodies to medical science for investigation, he suggests that you inquire, either through some lawyer friend or through some hospital, how you could do this and then make the necessary provision in your Will, stipulating that you wish your body to be of service to mankind in death, and that, being a Baha'i you request that your remains not be cremated and not be taken more than an hour's journey from the place you die.

The spirit has no more connection with the body after it departs, but as the body was once the temple of the spirit, we Baha'is are taught that it must be treated with respect.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
letter dated March 22, 1957, to an individual believer

Suicide

Suicide is forbidden in the Cause, God Who is the Author of all life can alone take it away, and dispose of it in a way He [18.11] deems best. Whoever commits suicide endangers his soul, and will suffer spiritually as a result in the other Worlds beyond.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1939

Abdu'l-Baha, in replying to a bereaved widow whose husband had taken his own life, stated the following:

As to thy husband, rest assured. He will be immersed in the ocean of pardon and forgiveness and will become the recipient of bounty and favour.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 201

Regarding the "In Memoriam" section of Baha'i News: although suicide is so strongly condemned in the teachings, it does not mean that a person has ceased to be a Baha'i because he killed himself; he should, therefore, be mentioned, the same as other believers, in this section.

Shoghi Effendi, in Principles of Baha'i Administration, p. 15

Euthanasia

As to the Baha'i viewpoint on the removal or withholding of life support in medical cases where intervention prolongs life in disabling illness, nothing has been found in the Sacred Text specifically on this matter. In such cases decisions must be left to those responsible, including the patient.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 31, 1979

We have received your letter of March 18, 1974, in which you ask for the Baha'i viewpoint on euthanasia and on the removal of life support in medical cases where physiological interventions prolong life in disabling illness. In general our teachings indicate that God, the Giver of life, can alone dispose of it as He deems best, and we have found nothing in the Sacred Text on these matters specifically but in a letter to an individual written on behalf of the beloved

Guardian by his secretary regarding mercy killings, or legalized euthanasia, it is stated:

...This is also a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to legislate.

Until such time as the Universal House of Justice considers legislation on euthanasia, decisions in the matters to which you refer must be left to the consciences of those responsible.
The Universal House of Justice, May 17, 1974, in Lights of Guidance, p. 291

Baha'is in Military Service
You should also advise all individual Baha'is who are in service that they should take whatever measures are necessary to see [18.12] that Baha'i laws regarding burial are observed. Such individuals should also notify their families or next of kin about these laws and of their wish to be buried according to Baha'i law.
The Universal House of Justice, in National Baha'i Review, #3, March 1968, p. 6

In addition to previous instructions which we have given to you concerning Baha'is who are killed in military service, you should inform...that, if it is possible under Army regulations, he should arrange with his Commanding Officer that in case of the loss of his life in Vietnam his body should be delivered to the National Spiritual Assembly of Vietnam, or their representatives, for interment in Vietnam in accordance with Baha'i law. He should also arrange with his relatives, if possible, so that they will not raise any objections to this procedure.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated July 31, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In Case of Death at Sea
The laws of burial as revealed by Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-iAqdas do not refer to the occurrence of death at sea. Until such time as the Universal House of Justice legislates on these matters, the friends when faced with such incidents should be guided by whatever civil or maritime law is applicable under the circumstances. Should land be reached, however, obviously the body must be buried on land in the nearest suitable place.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated October 20, 1974, in Lights of Guidance, p. 196

Baha'i laws of burial do not refer to burial at sea and the House of Justice has not yet legislated on the matter. However, it is preferable that Baha'i burial should take place on land whenever this is possible.
Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
December 23, 1985, in Lights of Guidance, p. 196

Memorial Gatherings
As you know, the offering of prayers on behalf of the departed, whether Baha'i or non-Baha'i, is encouraged in our teachings, as such prayers are conducive to the progress of their souls in the world beyond. As to the holding of memorial

gatherings at regular intervals, there is nothing in the teachings specifically prohibiting such gatherings, but we find general guidelines in the letters of the beloved Guardian, in which he warns the believers against adhering to the rites and customs of past systems and of former religions, and instead urges them to show forth the Baha'i [18.13] way of life and demonstrate the independent character of the Teachings of the Faith.

Advertising memorial gatherings by the family is entirely a personal matter for the family to decide. It is left to the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly whether Local Spiritual Assemblies may permit the use of their Baha'i Centres for such gatherings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated May 24, 1974, in Lights of Guidance, p. 200

Gifts and Good Deeds in Memory of the Deceased
The Master has told us that gifts and good deeds done in memory of those who have passed on, are most helpful to the development of their souls in the realms beyond....
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, December 10, 1952, in Lights of Guidance, p. 204

WILLS

The Need for a Will
It is incumbent upon everyone to write his testament....
Baha'u'llah, quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
August 24, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Every Baha'i is strongly recommended to make his own Will and he is perfectly free to dispose of his estate in whatever way he wishes.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated August 24, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The friends should be strongly advised to make wills specifying that they want their funerals to be conducted under the auspices of the Baha'i Faith, or at least in conformity with its requirements and they should make this known both to the Local Spiritual Assembly and to their own relatives, while they are still alive. In this way it is quite possible that agreements may be reached with nonBaha'i relatives before death takes place.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 18, 1972

Will Preparation
Other points to remember are that an individual is entirely free to leave his or her possessions as he wishes, provided all his debts are paid, and provided there are no legal limits on the freedom of individuals to bequeath their property. A person's will is sacred and therefore a Baha'i is not permitted to challenge the provisions of another's will. The civil law in relation to the making of wills is sometimes quite complex. It is, therefore, highly advisable for an individual to consult a lawyer when he makes his will to ensure that his

intention is not nullified by some possible breach of the requirements of the law in the drawing up or execution of the will. It is also highly desirable for a Baha'i to take steps during his [18.14] lifetime to ensure that he will be given a funeral in accordance with Baha'i law and that his remains be not cremated. It may be possible to include such a provision in the will, or some other procedure may need to be followed, depending upon the civil law.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 4, 1986, in Lights of Guidance, pp. 193-194

A will is particularly essential if a person wants the Baha'i Faith to have a share of his property. A Baha'i can use it also to record his wishes for the proper disposition of his Baha'i literature, files, and records, and to ensure that his children receive Baha'i training.

While most states permit a person to prepare his own will, it is often advisable to seek the assistance of an attorney. Writing and executing the Will to conform to the state law will help ensure that the person's wishes w ill be carried out after his death. A pamphlet, The Writing of a Will , giving instructions about will preparation, is available from the Treasurer's Office at the Baha'i National Center.

Often a will is neither read nor even located until after the burial. It is, therefore, preferable to keep an additional copy of the burial instructions separate from the will and in an easily accessible location. Family members or friends should know where the instructions are kept, and a copy could be given to a Local Spiritual Assembly. It should be noted that burial instructions are usually not legally binding.

Responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly
While it is appropriate and advisable for the friends to deposit a copy of their Wills with the Spiritual Assembly, they should not be required to do so, but should be left free in this matter.

The friends are free to formulate the provisions of their Wills as they please, and the Spiritual Assembly has the obligation to enforce these provisions unless, of course, they are in conflict with the interests of the Faith.

It is not necessary for the Spiritual Assembly to publish the text to a "model" Will. Each believer should compose his Will according to his own wishes....

The execution of the provisions of the will causes the spirit of the deceased to rejoice in the Abha Kingdom.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 24, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If the testator, being a Baha'i, makes a provision in his will that is contrary to Baha'i Law (e.g., to bury his remains in a place more than one hour's journey from the place of death), that provision is null and void in Baha'i law and the Assembly must not fulfill it even [18.15] if failure to do so would cause the bequest to be revoked in civil law. If failure to fulfill such a

condition does not cancel the bequest in civil law, the Assembly is not required to refuse the bequest as it would have to do in the case of failure to fulfill a valid condition.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 10, 1978

Local Assemblies should educate their communities regarding the importance of making a will. They may consider calling upon experts (e.g., attorneys, funeral directors, accountants) to assist them.

(See also in this Chapter, Section entitled "If Plans Are Made for Cremation")

You are free to inform those who ask that neither the National or Local Spiritual Assemblies should be named as executor of a will.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 14, 1971

LIFE AFTER DEATH

The Spiritual World Beyond and Our Relation to It

Concerning the question you have raised regarding the spiritual world beyond and our relation to it. After death the soul of man permanently departs from the material plane, and enters the world of the spirit, in which it can indefinitely progress and advance. The nature of that spiritual world is essentially different and superior to our earthly life here.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated April 10, 1938, to an individual believer

You ask an explanation of what happens to us after we leave this world: This is a question which none of the Prophets have ever answered in detail, for the very simple reason that you cannot convey to a person's mind something entirely different from everything they have ever experienced. 'Abdu'l-Baha gave the wonderful example of the relation of this life to the next life being like the child in the womb; it develops eyes, ears, hands, feet, tongue, and yet it has nothing to see or hear, it cannot walk or grasp things or speak; all these faculties it is developing for this world. If you tried to explain to an embryo what this world is like it would never understand,,but it understands when it is born, and its faculties can be used. So we cannot picture our state in the next world. All we know is that our consciousness, our personality, endures in some new state, and that that world is as much better than this one as this one is better than the dark womb of our mother was.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 3, 1943

[18.16] In His Tablets Baha'u'llah says that were we able to comprehend the felicities that await us in the world to come, death would lose its sting; nay rather we would welcome it as a gate-way to a realm immeasurably higher and nobler than this home of suffering we call our earth. You should therefore think of their blessings and comfort yourself for your momentary separation. In time all of us will join our departed ones and share their joys.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated Januar y 13, 1932, in an unpublished compilation, "Life After Death," enclosed with a letter from the Universal

House of Justice, dated September 6, 1973

According to Baha'u'llah the soul retains its individuality and consciousness after death, and is able to commune with other souls. This communion, however, is purely spiritual in character, and is conditioned upon the disinterested and selfless love of the individuals for each other.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 10, 1936

"Soul Mates"
There is no teaching in the Baha'i Faith that "soul mates" exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be ever-lasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.
Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, National Baha'i Review, #92, September 1975, p. 6

SUGGESTED READINGS

The Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah

Open Door

The Writing of a Will, an outline for teaching a course on wills preparation; from the Office of the Treasurer or the Baha'i Distribution Service

Unto Him Shall We Return, compiled by Hushidar Motlagh

Death: The Messenger of Joy, Madeleine Hellaby

19„MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS

BIRTH CONTROL

[19.1] Birth control...when exercised in order to deliberately prevent the procreation of any children is against the Spirit of the Law of Baha'u'llah, which defines the primary purpose of marriage to be the rearing of children and their spiritual training in the Cause.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
dated February 4, 1937, in Unrestrained As the Wind, pp. 133-34

To use birth control in order to have no children at all thwarts the purpose of marriage.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated February 27, 1973

There is nothing in the Sacred Writings specifically on the subjects of birth control, abortion or sterilization, but Baha'u'llah did state that the primary purpose of marriage was the procreation of children, and it is to this primary purpose that the beloved Guardian alludes.... This does not imply that a couple are obliged to have as many children as they can; the Guardian's secretary clearly stated on his behalf, in answer to an inquiry, that it was for the husband and wife to decide how many children they would have. A decision to

have no children at all would vitiate the primary purpose of marriage unless, of course, there were some medical reason why such a decision would be required.

You and your husband, therefore, should have no feeling that you are obliged to add to your already large family. This is a matter entirely for you to decide, and there are many methods of preventing conception, including self-discipline and restraint, to which you can have recourse. Sterilization, however, would be a more far-reaching action than any of these, with implications and results beyond those necessary for the immediate purpose of limiting the [19.2] size of your family, and is not permissible in Baha'i law except in rare instances where it is necessary for a medical reason.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 28, 1977

After Conception
It should be pointed out, however, that the Teachings state that the soul appears at conception, and that therefore it would be improper to use a method, the effect of which would be to produce an abortion after the conception has taken place.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 29, 1976, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

Sterilization
It is clear from the instructions of the beloved Guardian that sterilization merely for the purpose of preventing the conception of unwanted children is absolutely prohibited in the Faith. When asked about sterilization of the mentally deficient or the physically unfit the Guardian pointed out that there is no reference to this in the Teachings. Neither is there anything in the Teachings about the use of contraceptive methods in order to prevent the transmission through inheritance of undesirable family traits and tendencies. These are, therefore, matters which the Universal House of Justice will have to consider in future. We do not wish to legislate on such matters now, and therefore leave the decision in each case to the individual believers involved.

We have said, however, that there may be circumstances which would justify sterilization, and that those called upon to make decisions in this regard must rely on the best medical advice available (preferably more than one expert should be consulted) and their own consciences. They should also take into account the availability, reliability and reversibility of other methods of contraception.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 25, 1973, to an individual believer

Under normal circumstances it is not permissible to have a surgical operation for the purpose of not having more children if such an operation could result in permanent sterility. Baha'is considering such a step must be guided by the Baha'i principles involved, the best professional advice available to them, and their own consciences. If it is established that vasectomy and tubal ligation

are operations the effects of which are reversible and which, therefore, do not result in permanent sterility, they would not fall under this prohibition.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 16, 1985, to an individual believer

[19.3] Abortion
Abortion and surgical operations for the purpose of preventing the birth of unwanted children are forbidden in the Cause unless there are circumstances which justify such actions on medical grounds, in which case the decision, at present, is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated November 29, 1976, to a Local Spiritual Assembly

Basically the deliberate taking of human life is forbidden in the Cause, but the Sacred Text envisages certain possible exceptions to this rule and allows for the Universal House of Justice to legislate upon them. One such possible exception is the matter of abortion. It is clear that it is absolutely forbidden for a woman to have an abortion merely because she wants to have one, but there may be circumstances in which an abortion might be justified. However, at the present time we do not wish to legislate on whether or in what circumstances abortion may be permitted, and therefore the whole matter is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice on the case in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 5, 1975, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Surrogate Mothers, Artificial Insemination
Regarding surrogate mothers and artificial insemination, you will find the following extracts from statements made by the Universal House of Justice relevant to your questions:

The beloved Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer who inquired on the same subject, said "...there is nothing in our teachings about this, therefore there is no objection to having a baby by means of artificial insemination as long as your husband is the father of it."

Artificial insemination is, therefore, permissible to a Baha'i wife provided her husband is the donor.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 11, 1978

Also, after quoting the above statement of the Guardian, the following comment was made in another letter:

In view of this, the House of Justice has stated that it would not [19.4] be proper for a Baha'i to donate semen to a hospital for the artificial insemination of a woman other than his wife.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 27, 1981

Genetic Engineering

Nothing specific has been found in the Baha'i writings on genetic engineering. This is therefore a matter on which the House of Justice may have to legislate but the time has not yet come for that. The subject is quite complex, and an informed opinion can be offered only when the scientific understanding is much further advanced than at present and the social implications are clearer. With the emergence of adequate understanding, it will also be opportune to deal with ethical issues involved. In the meantime, Baha'is faced with questions about genetic engineering are free to come to their own conclusions based on their knowledge of the Baha'i teachings on nature and the purpose of life. However, they should be careful not to make dogmatic statements or offer their own understanding as the teaching of the Faith.

GOSSIP AND BACKBITING

The friends should understand that they should not only cease backbiting and gossiping, but should cease listening to others who fall into this sin. Ignoring gossip and slander is a positive, constructive and healing action helpful to the community, the gossiper and to the persons slandered.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 21, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

See also Chapter 8, "Developing a Distinctive Baha'i Community")

DEBTS

Your Assembly should not deprive him of his voting rights...because he cannot, or will not, liquidate his debts. If once the precedent is established that a Baha'i can be deprived of his voting rights on such grounds as these, you can see for yourself where it would lead.
Letter written of behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 20, 1954

See also Chapter 15, Section entitled "Dishonest or Fraudulent Behavior")

SMOKING AT BAHA'I MEETINGS

Believers have also raised the question about smoking during Baha'i meetings. It is entirely within the authority of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies to prohibit smoking in meetings held [19.5] under their auspices. An Assembly may well feel that it does not wish to raise an additional barrier to seekers by prohibiting smoking at public meetings...and firesides in case it is offensive to some seekers. In the case of Nineteen Day Feasts or meetings of Assemblies or committees, it is not right that friends who find smoking offensive should be made to endure it in Baha'i meetings which they are required or expected to attend. If certain individuals feel that they must smoke, then arrangements, such as a break in the meeting, could be made for their convenience. It would, of course, be entirely inappropriate to smoke during the devotional part of a Feast, or at any other devotional gathering.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 4, 1974, to a National Spiritual Assembly

PILGRIMAGE

You have asked about visiting holy places and the observance of marked reverence toward these resplendent spots. Holy places are undoubtedly centers of the outpouring of Divine grace, because on entering the illumined sites associated with martyrs and holy souls, and by observing reverence, both physical and spiritual, one's heart is moved with great tenderness.
'Abdu'l-Baha, in Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Notes and References, p. 61

Pilgrimage to the Holy Places at the Baha'i World Center is a precious bounty, clearly a highlight of one's life. The Universal House of Justice wrote that while on pilgrimage Baha'is have the opportunity "to pray in the Shrines of the Central Figures of their Faith, to visit the places hallowed by the footsteps, sufferings and triumphs of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, and to meditate in the tranquillity of these sacred precincts, beautified with so much loving care by our beloved Guardian."

Baha'is may apply for pilgrimage by contacting the Pilgrimage Office at the Baha'i World Center.

HANDLING BUSINESS DISPUTES

While it is always to be hoped that Baha'is will find ways of settling disputes without resort to the civil courts, and while it may be desirable that the parties consult their Assembly, the Assembly is not always required to assume the role of adjudicator.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated March 29, 1979, to a National Spiritual Assembly

He does not want the friends to form the habit of taking up a kind of Baha'i litigation against each other. Their duties to humanity are too sacred and urgent in these days, when the Cause [19.6] is struggling to spread and assert its independence, for them to spend their precious time, and his precious time, in this way. Ask them, therefore, to unite, forget the past, and serve as never before.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 22, 1947,
in Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 69

ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS VENTURE

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 15 February concerning the proposal by a number of Baha'is to establish a private company whose shares would be owned by Baha'is and which would be managed for the financial profit of the friends and of the Faith. We are instructed to transmit its advice.

Your objective to generate funds for the Faith is, of course, praiseworthy. In the past, as you may assume, similar proposals have been made to the House of Justice, and the following guidelines may be helpful from a letter to an individual:

Concerning the formation of a company which you and other friends have

suggested, the Universal House of Justice...has decided that the time has not yet come to have the Baha'i institutions involved in a business transaction in the way which was suggested.

If the friends, however, are willing, spontaneously, to establish a profitable business in order to benefit themselves as well as the other friends, it is meritorious and there is no objection.

Should such a business venture as you propose be undertaken,„and there is nothing wrong with it in principle,„it would be well to advise the Baha'is who participate to approach it on the basis of its viability as a business project and they should not underestimate the possibilities of financial loss.

The House of Justice feels that the institutions of the Faith should neither themselves become involved in nor promote such a private business. The use of national endowments as collateral for such a business is not permissible.
Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice,
dated April 5, 1982, in Lights of Guidance, p. 253

MILITARY SERVICE

General Principles

Baha'is recognize the right and duty of governments to use force for the maintenance of law and order and to protect their people. Thus, for a Baha'i, the shedding of blood for such a purpose is not necessarily essentially wrong. The Baha'i Faith draws a [19.7] very definite distinction between the duty of an individual to forgive and "to be killed rather than to kill" and the duty of society to uphold justice. This matter is explained by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Some Answered Questions. In the present condition of the world Baha'is try to keep themselves out of the internecine conflicts that are raging among their fellow men and to avoid shedding blood in such struggles, but this does not mean that we are absolute pacifists.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated February 9, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Pacifists, Conscientious Objectors

With reference to the absolute pacifists, or conscientious objectors to war; their attitude, judged from the Baha'i standpoint, is quite antisocial and due to its exaltation of the individual conscience leads inevitably to disorder and chaos in society. Extreme pacifists are thus very close to the anarchists, in the sense that both of these groups lay an undue emphasis on the rights and merits of the individual. The Baha'i conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the "golden mean." The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority.

The other main objection to the conscientious objectors is that their method of establishing peace is too negative. Non-cooperation is too passive a philosophy

to become an effective way for social reconstruction. Their refusal to bear arms can never establish peace. There should first be a spiritual revitalization which nothing, except the Cause of God, can effectively bring to every man's heart.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted by the Universal House of Justice, dated February 9, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Non-Combatant Status
There are many other avenues through which the believers can assist in a time of war by enlisting in services of a non-combatant nature„services that do not involve the direct shedding of blood„such as ambulance work, air raid precaution service, office and administrative works, and it is for such types of national service that they should volunteer.

It is immaterial whether such activities would still expose them to dangers, either at home or in the front, since their desire is not to protect their lives, but to desist from any acts of willful murder.
Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Baha'i Administration, pp. 95-96

[19.8] We think that Baha'is should be discouraged from seeking or continuing a career in the military, and that in any event they must, in obedience to the Guardian's clear instructions, apply for exemptions from military duty which necessitates the taking of human life.

When the law imposes an obligation upon citizens to fulfill a term of military service, as the U.S. Selective Service Act does, and a Baha'i may fulfill this term of service by enlisting, reenlisting or by being commissioned as an officer, he may do so provided he does not in any way jeopardize his right to "apply for and maintain the noncombatant status" within the spirit of the above principle.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 20, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

There is no objection to a Baha'i's enlisting voluntarily in the armed forces of a country in order to obtain a training in some trade or profession, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 13, 1981

Note: At this time, we are not aware of any branch of the United States armed forces which will guarantee that the enlistee will not be assigned to combat.

Sanctions should not be imposed for violation of these instructions. It is for each believer, under pain of his own conscience, to determine for himself what his actions should be, bearing in mind that the application of these principles is the spiritual obligation of every Baha'i. It is rather for your Assembly to see that adequate instruction is provided so that the friends will let these principles be mirrored forth in their actions, and that they will be so steadfast in their love for Baha'u'llah that it would be unthinkable for them

to willingly place themselves in a position where they must take human life.
Letter from the Universal House of Justice,
dated September 20, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The Baha'i teachings require that followers of the Faith obey the laws of the government under which they live. Baha'is do not on the grounds of religious conviction seek to abandon their obligations as citizens; instead, they are able to reconcile their fundamental spiritual convictions and their civil obligations as citizens by applying for non-combatant service under the existing laws and [19.9] regulations. They try to serve as members of the Armed Forces in the medical corps or in any capacity in which they may legally maintain a non-combatant status regardless of the effect which that may have on their personal safety, convenience, the kind of activity they must discharge or the rank to which they may be assigned.

Draft Registration
All men in the United States must register for the draft upon attaining the age of 18. Baha'i youth are not required to request non-combatant status at that time. Should a draft be instituted, those affected should contact the National Spiritual Assembly for specific instructions.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 14-16

Trustworthiness, a compilation of the writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

Memorials of the Faithful, selection of stories by 'Abdu'l-Baha

A Chaste and Holy Life, Shoghi Effendi

Citadel of Faith, Shoghi Effendi, pp. 95-96

God Passes By, Shoghi Effendi, particularly pp. 183-220, 244-251

Messages to the Baha'i World (1950-1957), Shoghi Effendi, pp. 47-75

Living the Life, a compilation of guidance from letters from Shoghi Effendi, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

The Pattern of Baha'i Life, compilations of extracts from the Baha'i Writings on living a Baha'i life, published by the Publishing Trust of the United Kingdom

Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Ruhiyyih Khanum

Priceless Pearl, Ruhiyyih Khanum

Crown of Beauty, Eunice Braun and Hugh Chance

Door of Hope, Dr. David Rhue

The Dawn-Breakers, Nabil-i-Azam

Shoghi Effendi, Ugo Giachery

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