

democratically elected administrative councils share a strong commitment to the practice of the principle of equality in their personal lives, in their families, and in all aspects of social and civic life.”

The Baha’i faith has no clergy. The community’s affairs are organized by the full participation of its members and administered by democratically elected nine-member governing bodies at the local, national, regional and global levels. Women and men serve together at each administrative level, except for the Universal House of Justice, a body which oversees the Baha’i activities on a global level. Service on this institution is restricted by Baha’i scripture to men. Although the reason for this limitation is not provided, the Baha’i scriptures specify that it will become unmistakably clear in the future at a more advanced stage of social understanding, and that it will not contradict the reality of gender equality. This is confirmed by the host of women who were appointed to serve as Hands of the Cause of God, the highest spiritual rank attainable by Baha’i individuals. Furthermore, the daughter of Baha’u’llah, Bahiyyih Khanum, directed the affairs of the global Baha’i community from 1921 to 1924—the first time in recorded history that a woman was the acting head of a world religion.

Baha’is who champion gender equality look back to the inspiring example of Tahiri, an early follower of their faith. She was a highly educated and accomplished poet who broke the bonds that enslaved women in nineteenth century Persia. Tahiri was imprisoned for her religious beliefs and eventually strangled by her captors. Before her death, she told her executioners, “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.”

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