

Participant Handouts

Builders of Communities:
**The Equality of Women
and Men, Part 2:
The Assembly's Role in
Fostering Partnership**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

The Assembly's Role in Fostering Partnership

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To explore the complementary roles of the individual and the Assembly in establishing the equality of women and men

This workshop explores the complementary roles of the individual and the Assembly in establishing the equality of women and men and lists resources available to the Assembly to help in this task. It contains visioning exercises and also includes an opportunity for the Assembly to examine current patterns and practices in the community and assess the extent to which women have been welcomed into partnership in various aspects of community life.

What you will find inside your handouts:

- ★ Quotations and worksheets for the various segments of the workshop
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by you
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by the Assembly within two months after the workshop

If you would like to have information on additional workshops or other Assembly development resources, ask your Assembly Development representative or contact the Office of Assembly Development at (847) 733-3490, by mail at 1233 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201, or by e-mail at OAD@usbnc.org.

Note: If time is short for any exercise, focus on the quotations in bold

The Call to a New State of Mind

“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í 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.”

“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í 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 Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize* the forces of a new civilization.

“. . . 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 Bahá’í 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.”

The Universal House of Justice , Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our . . . commitments.”

The Universal House of Justice , Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1990.

***Canalize** : to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for

“Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives. . . .”

“The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed . . . to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structure of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh in the wake of humanity’s suffering and turmoil.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1992.

“But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge. . . .”

Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 192.

Facilitating the Process of Change

“... change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time. . . .”

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The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1990.

“Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships – among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions – reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization – then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

“Movement in this direction has barely begun. It will lead, as it unfolds, to a new understanding of the nature of the family and of the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. It will entirely transform the role of women at every level of society.”

Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, January 23, 1995, in *Prosperity of Humankind*, section III.

“We need a change of heart, a reframing of all our conceptions and a new orientation of our activities. The inward life of man as well as his outward environment have to be reshaped. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 27, 1932, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, p. 85.

“Because the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one, the transformation now required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions.”

Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, January 23, 1995, in *Prosperity of Humankind*, section I.

“Change is an evolutionary process. . . .”

“We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

“No movement in the world directs its attention upon both these aspects of human life and has full measures for their improvement, save the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 17, 1933, *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, pp. 84-85.

“Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one’s self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.”

The Universal House of Justice , July 25, 1984, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 634.

Working Together

Focus questions

- ★ How are women and men intended to relate to each other?
- ★ What are the effects of not achieving this relationship?

“Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Women, p. 26, #54.

“Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 136.

“Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of functions. In some things women excel men, for others men are better fitted than women, while in very many things the difference of sex is of no effect at all.”

The Universal House of Justice, Women, p. 15, #30.

“The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 182.

“The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 302.

“As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 133.

Working Together, continued

“... the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace.”

“Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 76.

“The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one-half of the world’s population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.”

The Universal House of Justice, The Promise of World Peace, section II.

A Shared Responsibility

This handout is a synthesis of quotations from the Bahá'í Writings previously studied in the workshop "The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1: A Shared Responsibility."

Guidance primarily for men:

- ★ Do not assume superiority over women, as this depresses their aspirations and ambition, leading gradually to hopelessness
- ★ Do not imply women are inferior in capacity and qualification
- ★ Encourage women to advance by conveying the message, "You are most capable, and if you endeavor, you will attain the highest degree"
- ★ Own the equality of women as an issue of vital importance to you
- ★ Do not allow women to be the object of cruelty or tyranny
- ★ Demonstrate to the world a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation

Guidance primarily for women:

- ★ Do not consider your present merits and capacities but focus on the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh
- ★ Endeavour to attain greater perfection, to be man's equal in every respect, to make progress in areas in which women have traditionally been backward
- ★ Prove capacity and aptitude and show forth the evidences of equality
- ★ Become proficient in the arts and sciences and prove by accomplishments that women's abilities have merely been latent

Guidance that applies to both men and women:

- ★ Exercise patience, loving understanding, and forbearance
- ★ Pursue the principle of equality in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life
- ★ Study the principles and try to live according to them
- ★ Use the Bahá'í community as a laboratory, where you can translate into constructive action the principles of the Faith
- ★ Increase the opportunities open to woman
- ★ Promote the equality of the sexes in a way that does not disrupt the unity of the believers
- ★ Work together cooperatively
- ★ Realize that the Bahá'í approach to truth-seeking is consultative and not adversarial, and that contention between men and women is counter-productive to promoting equality

Special Strengths of Women

“... men and women have basic and distinct qualities.”

“Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of functions. In some things women excel men, for others men are better fitted than women, while in very many things the difference of sex is of no effect at all.”

The Universal House of Justice, Women, p. 15, #30.

“You are quite right in stating that men and women have basic and distinct qualities. The solution provided in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is not, as you correctly observe, for men to become women, and for women to become men. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave us the key to the problem when He taught that the qualities and functions of men and women ‘complement’ each other.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, Women, 1990), p. 16, #34.

“In some respects woman is superior to man. She is more tender-hearted, more receptive, her intuition is more intense.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 161.

“The woman has greater moral courage than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Women, p. 40, #87.

“The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Women, p. 13, #25.

“Among the miracles which distinguish this sacred Dispensation is this, that women have evinced a greater boldness than men when enlisted in the ranks of the Faith.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 69.

“... a real evidence of woman’s superiority will be her service and efficiency in the establishment of universal peace.”

“In this wondrous dispensation . . . women have assumed the attributes of men in showing forth steadfastness in the Cause of God, and revealing the heroism and might of fearless men. They invaded the arena of mystic knowledge and hoisted aloft the banner on the heights of certitude.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Women, p. 5, #9.

“. . . strive to show in the human world that women are most capable and efficient, that their hearts are more tender and susceptible than the hearts of men, that they are more philanthropic and responsive toward the needy and suffering, that they are inflexibly opposed to war and are lovers of peace. Strive that the ideal of international peace may become realized through the efforts of womankind, for man is more inclined to war than woman, and a real evidence of woman’s superiority will be her service and efficiency in the establishment of universal peace.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 284.

The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality

Focus questions

- ★ What roles can the Local Spiritual Assembly play in fostering the equality of women and men?
- ★ What specific courses of action are mentioned? What are practical expressions of these?

“The members of the Spiritual Assembly should do all they can to provide encouragement to the women believers.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Women: A Compilation of Extracts from the Baha’i Writings (Rev. ed., 1990), #19.

“The Spiritual Assemblies are collectively the most effective of all instruments for establishing unity and harmony. This matter is of the utmost importance; this is the magnet that draweth down the confirmations of God.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 83-84.

“It can therefore be deduced that the importance of the Bahá’í administration is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the requirements of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among the friends.”

The Universal House of Justice, May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Rights and Responsibilities, p. 39.

“Members of assemblies, national and local, must be the first to set a worthy example to their fellow-believers.”

Shoghi Effendi, in Light of Divine Guidance, Vol. 1, p. 155.

“Bahá’ís in their deep love for Bahá’u’lláh should be eager to apply every spiritual precept in their own lives while at the same time exercising patience, forbearance and forgiveness in respect to the shortcomings of others. It is for the Institutions of the Faith to adopt such programmes as will deepen the believers in their understanding of the teachings so that they will unhesitatingly and eagerly follow Him.”

The Universal House of Justice, May 22, 1966, in Lights of Guidance, fifth edition, pp. 363-64.

“. . . the Bahá’ís . . . should initiate and implement programs which will stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá’í community life, so that through their accomplishments the friends will demonstrate the distinction of the Cause of God in this field of human endeavor.”

The Universal House of Justice, May 25, 1975, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986, p. 309.

The Assembly's Role in Establishing Equality, continued

“The members of the Spiritual Assembly should do all they can to provide encouragement to the women believers.”

“It is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assemblies to provide the mothers with a well-planned programme for the education of children, showing how, from infancy, the child must be watched over and taught. These instructions must be given to every mother to serve her as a guide, so that each will train and nurture her children in accordance with the Teachings.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 138.

“The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá’u’lláh’s World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá’í society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá’í flock.”

The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz 1974 Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, *Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 264.

Resources Available to the Assembly

Several resources exist to help Assemblies fulfill their responsibility to foster the equality of women and men

1. Equality training

A program to help Bahá'ís and interested friends of the Faith develop and implement strategies for promoting equality in the home, in the Bahá'í community, and in the world at large. Using an interactive approach and a Writings-based curriculum, participants begin by exploring the meaning of equality and the necessity for cooperation and mutual support between women and men. They then develop and practice strategies for fostering equality in marriage and in Bahá'í community life, for raising children to live out the principle of equality, and for teaching this principle to others.

This four module, 32 hour Core Curriculum program is scheduled with local trainers through the National Teacher Training Center, Louhelen Bahá'í School (phone 810-653-5033; e-mail: louhelen@usbnc.org)

2. *Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men*

The National Spiritual Assembly's powerful statement on the Faith's vision of full partnership between the sexes is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (1-800-999-9019).

3. *Women*

This 59 page compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice is grouped around the themes of the Bahá'í concept of equality, the role of education in the development of women, the application of the principle of equality to family life, women in the world at large, and fostering the development of women. It is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

4. *Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective*

This 351 page book is a broad survey by Dr. Janet A. Khan and Dr. Peter J. Khan which provides a comprehensive examination of many aspects of the equality of women and men. Assemblies may be particularly interested in chapters 5-7, which discuss implementation of the principle of equality.

5. *The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs*

This 87 page booklet, published by the Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women, addresses themes and issues which form the "Platform for Action" of the

Additional Resources

1995 United National World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. The booklet is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and is also included on the Bahá'í International Community's web site: www.bic-un.bahai.org

6. *Brilliant Star* magazine

Many issues of this magazine, a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly, contain activities that promote the advancement of women and the equality of the sexes. The activities are designed primarily for children and youth but are useful for all ages. Copies of some, but not all, single back issues of the magazine are available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and/or the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School. Subscriptions are available by contacting Subscriber Service at the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

Study and Discussion Questions for Use with “Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men”

Study and discussion questions

1. What does the “emancipation of women” mean? Provide examples.
2. What does the “achievement of full equality between the sexes” mean? Provide examples.
3. What is the root cause of discrimination against women?
4. What impact does the inequality of women have on society?
5. What will happen when women attain full partnership with men? Provide examples.
6. How have women been systematically oppressed throughout history? Provide examples.
7. What are some of the unexamined, inherited prejudiced assumptions that have traditionally been made about women? That are currently being made about women?
8. What will bring about the equality of the sexes?
9. What impact will the equality and full partnership of women and men have on society?
10. The full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life is essential to social and economic development, the abolition of war, and the ultimate establishment of a united world. What does full and equal participation mean? Provide examples.
11. How do Bahá’ís reconcile reverence for motherhood and rearing of children with women entering the same spheres of activity as men?
12. The Bahá’í writings assert that women and men share similar “station and rank” in the eyes of God. Provide examples where this is not yet true in the Bahá’í community. What should be done about this?
13. How will women become that greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration?
14. What must be done to promote women into positions of prominence and authority? Is this sufficient?
15. How will the “new age” be different?
16. The Universal House of Justice asserts that “Men have an inescapable duty to promote the equality of women.” How can they do this?
17. What will happen when men “own” the equality of women?

Study and Discussion Questions for Use with the compilation “Women”

Discussion questions

1. Find several quotations about the status or station of women as compared to men.
2. In what arenas of life does the Faith envision women making a contribution?
3. What does the Faith say about the functions of men and women, as distinct from the equality of men and women?
4. What functions are specifically mentioned for women? From what function(s) are women exempt by virtue of their gender?
5. What special gifts or attributes do women have?
6. Find several quotations which highlight areas in which women are encouraged to strive.
7. What are the teachings of the Faith about rights and responsibilities of mothers as compared to fathers?
8. What effect will women have on the establishment of peace?
9. What special responsibilities fall on women in Western countries? Eastern countries?
10. What effect have Western women (as compared to men) had on the establishment of the Faith?
11. Compose a reply, based on the Writings, to the statement that “The prohibition against women serving on the Universal House of Justice proves that Bahá’ís do not really believe in the equality of women and men.”

Optional general question

Our society tends to give status based on the type of work we do and ranks different kinds of work in a hierarchy, some greatly valued and others less so. Identify and describe ways in which the Bahá’í teachings on work, service, worship, education, and mothering will impact the low value currently given to homemaking and child care.

Building Communities of Partnership

“ . . . it [the equality of the sexes] has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá’í domestic and community life.”

“The American Bahá’í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole, cannot hope, at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund* nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 127.

“It [the principle of the oneness of humankind] has widespread implications which affect and remold all dimensions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner in which people relate to each other, and the eradication* of those age-old practices which deny the intrinsic* human right of every individual to be treated with consideration and respect.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 24, 1993, in *The American Bahá’í*, 24, no. 17 (November 23, 1993), p. 10.

“This principle [the equality of the sexes] is far more than the enunciation* of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral* element of Bahá’í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, January 24, 1993, in *The American Bahá’í*, 24, no. 17 (November 23, 1993), p. 10.

- ***moribund**: stagnant; near death
- ***eradicate**: to destroy utterly, exterminate; to pull up by the roots
- ***intrinsic**: belonging to a thing by its very nature
- ***enunciate**: to proclaim; to state or declare definitely
- ***integral**: belonging as an essential part of the whole

“Bahá’ís . . . are subject to all the pressures and standards of the prevalent culture of the society in which they live, and can only too easily be unconsciously influenced in their behavior by the accepted norms of that culture. One of our challenging tasks as Bahá’ís, however, is to establish, through our personal conduct and through the pattern of life in our communities and institutions, those cultural standards which Bahá’u’lláh wishes us to uphold.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 18, 1996.

**“... the Bahá’ís
are
distinguished ...
by their
acceptance of
Bahá’u’lláh’s
vision and
willingness to
work toward it.”**

“As you know, the Bahá’ís are distinguished not by their perfection or their immunity from the negative influences of the wider society in which they live, but by their acceptance of Bahá’u’lláh’s vision and willingness to work toward it. Each of us must strike a balance between realistically facing our community’s shortcomings, and focusing on Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings rather than our fellow believers as our standard of faith. This comment is not intended to belittle your concerns, but rather to place them in perspective so that you may not become discouraged as you strive toward the ideal.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 5, 1979, *Toward Oneness*, p. 65, #147.

Examining the Assembly's Internal Functioning

Answer the following questions

- ★ What is the makeup of the Assembly by gender? Has the makeup of the Assembly by gender been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
- ★ What gender is the current Assembly chair? Has this been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
- ★ What gender is the current Assembly secretary? Has this been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
- ★ What gender is the current Assembly treasurer? Has this been a consistent pattern over the past five years?
- ★ To what degree do our local statistics reflect our understanding that both women and men can perform each of these duties?

Comments or observations I suggest that the Assembly consult about at a future Assembly meeting

Demographics of Our Community

Identify the percentage of women and men in the local Bahá'í community

Determine, roughly, the percentage of participation in the following community activities of each gender

	Women	Men
% of total local Bahá'í community	_____	_____
Attending Feast	_____	_____
Hosting/preparing Feast	_____	_____
Attending Holy Days	_____	_____
Planning/hosting Holy Days	_____	_____
Contributing to the Fund	_____	_____
Teaching events	_____	_____
Deepenings	_____	_____
Children's activities	_____	_____
Service on committees	_____	_____
Selection as speaker for an event	_____	_____

Analysis

Compare the participation figures of each gender to its percentage figures of the local Bahá'í population. Note any gaps which indicate one gender is not involved in some aspect of Bahá'í community life.

Implementation of the principle of the equality of women and men necessarily challenges traditional practices. What does it challenge in this community?

Planning for Change

Consult on the following two focus questions

- ★ Have special efforts previously been made to encourage full participation by both sexes in the life of the community? What have been the results of these efforts?
- ★ In light of the points surfaced during the activities and assessments just completed, what adjustments to current practices and expectations would help ensure a Bahá'í environment in which both women and men feel a sense of welcome, safety, belonging, and full partnership?

Comments or observations I suggest that the Assembly consult about at a future Assembly meeting

For future consultation

Your consultation during this activity is just a beginning step in the ongoing process of implementing change. Please consult further at future Assembly meetings on the second focus question and on the following related questions:

- ★ How can the Assembly draw out and develop those special strengths of women mentioned in the Writings in the local community?
- ★ How can the Assembly provide opportunities for women in the local community to use these qualities?

Planning for Change, continued

**For future
consultation,
continued**

- ★ In what ways can the Assembly support the efforts of individual Bahá'ís to implement the principle of equality in their daily life?
- ★ What activities will help individuals and the Bahá'í community as a whole take the next step in their personal and collective development relating to this principle?
- ★ What activities can the Assembly arrange that both stress the importance of this principle and that also engage community members in actions that lead to a consolidation of behaviors that reflect equality?
- ★ If assessments reveal a pattern of less participation of women in the affairs of the Cause, how can the Assembly design and implement activities in such a way that women are enabled to participate more fully?
- ★ How can the Assembly make full use of the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Two Wings of a Bird" within the Bahá'í community?
- ★ How can the Assembly introduce the National Spiritual Assembly's statement "Two Wings of a Bird" to leaders of thought and people of prominence in the local community?
- ★ In what ways can the Assembly collaborate with other groups or initiate activities to act as a catalyst for change in the area of gender equality?

Note: The Assembly may find it helpful during these consultations to refer to the poster or chart you made earlier of the roles the Assembly can play in establishing equality and practical expressions of each course of action.

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator’s Guide

**From
“Envisioning the
Full Partnership
of Women and
Men”**

“Spiritual Assemblies must see their communities as they want them to be. . . and know that has been completed in the spiritual world. Then they must gear all activities to transferring that spiritual potential to the temporal world. When they work as if the completion of each task is a reality it probably will become so.”

John Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, p. 184.

**From “Special
Strengths of
Women”**

“I have left for a time the affairs of the Cause both at home and abroad, under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf [Bahíyyih Khánúm]. . . .”

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 25.

**From “Optional
Extension:
Checking for
Double
Standards”**

“. . . when there is an isolated but serious offence, such as that of a Bahá’í woman who indulges in one act of immorality as a result of which she gives birth to a child out of wedlock, this is no grounds for the removal of administrative rights. But the Assembly, when it learns of the situation, should certainly arrange for the believer to be met and consulted with, to assist her in her difficulties, to ascertain her attitude to the situation. If she has no regret for the offence and indicates that she feels free to repeat it in future, she will need to be educated in the teachings, counselled and, if she does not change her attitude, to be warned that a continuation of such actions would cause forfeiture of her administrative rights. If, however, she is contrite and is determined to lead a moral life henceforth, there would be no question of sanctions. The same course would be followed with the man involved, if he were a Bahá’í.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, December 9, 1991.

From “Closing”

“In the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Bahá’u’lláh. . . . No soul can retard or prevent it.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, new translation of a passage originally in *Paris Talks*, pp. 195-96.

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator's Guide, continued

**From
“Closing,”
continued**

“. . . the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh will aid them and the institutions of His World Order to see the realization of every principle ordained by His unerring Pen, including the equality of men and women, as expounded in the Writings of the Cause.”

The Universal House of Justice, May 31, 1988, to a National Spiritual Assembly, quoted in *Advancement of Women*, p. 296.